



## Bourgeois Anonymous

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The hall is full of black robed, hooded figures: impossible to tell whether they are men or women. Lavinia sits trembling in her anonymity, asking herself what she is doing here, well-brought-up middle class girl that she is? After the hooded Teacher has addressed the assembly and its members have begun to testify, she knows the answer. She is joining this strange body, and soon she, too, will be breaking free of the inhibitions and restrictions of society. Soon she will be peeling off the most humiliating label of our age: the label which says Bourgeois.

Later Lavinia goes to a party disguised as a mermaid, and there she meets a space man. It would be a most promising encounter, but for one thing. The space man is the least bourgeois person she has ever met – but his one ambition is to learn how to conform.

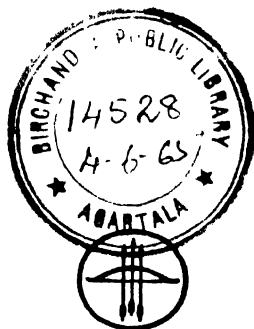
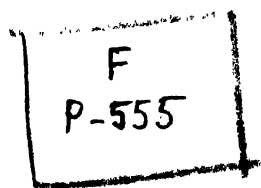
Having contrived this situation, Morris Philipson's exuberant imagination develops it in many unexpected and delightful ways. His first novel, an unorthodox blend of satire, fantasy and acute social observation, is outstanding.



MORRIS PHILIPSON

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# Bourgeois Anonymous



ANDRE DEUTSCH



**FIRST PUBLISHED 1914**

**FOR**

**Susan**



I had always a strong Impulse that  
I should some time recover my Liberty,  
although it were impossible to conjecture  
by what Means, or to form any Project  
with the least Hope<sup>r</sup> of succeeding.

JONATHAN SWIFT, *Gulliver's Travels*



# Bourgeois Anonymous



## Chapter One

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'THE meeting is scheduled for nine,' Googie remarked as Lavinia and she continued to hurry along the avenue.

'You said that just a minute ago.' Lavinia felt as if the cold was *frosting* white the tips of her pigskin gloves, her chocolate-coloured shoes, and her curled blonde hair. 'The meeting usually doesn't start until eleven.'

'The later the better. The members become more honest the closer it gets to midnight.' Googie, short and stocky, marched along with determined strides; Lavinia, somewhat taller and svelter, seemed to ice-skate by her side. 'It's only because it fell on New Year's Eve tonight,' Googie explained, 'they announced last time it would be held earlier. Our cell leader is awfully sensitive to noise. Last time the noise around here was deadly on New Year's *1* e.' She looked at her watch again and steered Lavinia across the avenue. 'We have seven minutes to go! No one's admitted after the doors are closed! It's the beginning of self-discipline to be on time! You've got to be on time!'

And then, breathless, they were at the steps of the brown-stone house. All the windows in the building were black-draped from inside. No one stood in the little vestibule before the front door, but as soon as they had passed through the entrance, they found the black hallway crowded to the



door. It was like entering a subway train at rush hour – with the lights turned off. Lavinia slowly became aware of a dim blood-red bulb, about the size of a thumb, hanging close to the ceiling in the middle of the room.

Googie kept a firm grip on Lavinia's elbow. In the silence of these close quarters, they helped each other with their coats and hung them on pegs in the wall on the left. Lavinia's hand slapped against a man's heavy shoulder as she brought her arm down. 'I *beg* your pardon!' He grunted. 'Ssshush,' Googie said sharply. No one else spoke. All the black forms seemed to have their backs turned to Lavinia. Now Googie led her to the wall on the right. There, on another line of pegs, hung the robes. They were black and all the same size. Narrowed between the press of other bodies, she awkwardly took one, held it up behind Lavinia, who slipped both arms in, and then Googie reminded her to catch the three clasps that held it closed in front. Lavinia's heartbeat was already bothering her hearing, and she felt the lines of cold perspiration being drawn down the back of her neck to meet at her spine.

Although her roommate had described every detail of this procedure to her in advance, Lavinia endured one revelation after another. She had anticipated the darkness and the pegs and the robes – but without imagining the presence of other bodies crowding in on her, without the surprise of the cloaks smelling like aprons laundered by the United Towel Company, and the fragrance of musky perfumes mingled in the close air with mechanics' grease and pipe tobacco. Her nostrils were being stuffed with surprises.

'Ready?' Googie's whisper came, as the first brassy gong sounded. It reverberated throughout the house and then ceased suddenly as if it was stopped from letting the message get beyond the walls. It reverberated through Lavinia's body like a shudder, and it echoed the question 'Ready? Ready? Ready?' About to say: 'No! This is madness. I can't go through with it!' she felt herself herded into the single

line leading into the assembly room. There was no turning back. She straightened up nervously as the line moved forward. She could see the pale green light through the slit of a doorway.

As she came to the entrance, the outline of the man before her bent, and two black arms slipped the hood over his head. The hood was green and peaked. This she saw; then it was her turn. She lowered her head – to see blue suede shoes, brown trouser legs cut off by the black hem. Whoever it was had not seen her face. The hood came down over her head. Blackness! The laundry odour! Her hands rushed up towards the mask, but before she had touched it, the arms had it adjusted. She could see through the two eyeholes! The tap on her shoulder started her moving again, and Lavinia stepped cautiously into the assembly hall.

Bridge chairs had been set up in neat rows facing the far end. Fifteen or twenty cloaked and hooded figures were already seated in the first five or six rows, but some were scattered alone all the way back to the rear. She jumped as Googie touched her arm from behind and moved her sideways into the next row. While the hall continued to fill, she moved her head cautiously, as if on a delicate swivel, discovering how high the ceiling was, how the space at the end was arranged with a speaker's platform without flowers or even a water pitcher and a glass. The room was clean but empty and undecorated except for the chairs and the speaker's stand and the hidden bulbs that made the light green.

All the life in the room was hidden within each cloaked and hooded figure, and the awareness of all the chairs gradually becoming filled almost choked her with the feeling that, for the first time in her life, she had no idea of how to defend herself. Each figure was a threat. Every silent hulk of a concealed body might be part of a conspiracy to ridicule her. The figures continued to file into the hall like mandarins keeping their hands out of sight within the long sleeves.

Only their shoes could be seen, and then only until they sat down. The Teacher called that 'their clay feet', Googie had told her.

Suddenly it struck Lavinia that she looked exactly like all the rest! She was hidden to all of them as they were to her. Googie sitting next to her might have been a mirror image. The black cloak and the green hood. That was all. Negro or white, male or female, ugly or beautiful – all distinctions disappeared. She had made the first discovery: she had absolutely no façade, no appearance, no visible 'front'. No one could make out from how she looked or what she wore what 'kind' of person she was, or what she might be thinking. For the first time since she had been an infant, she could be *unself*-conscious! She could become *as* a child: freed from reflecting on what other people thought of her.

The gong sounded again. That quieted her. She heard the door locked. Turning, she saw the last entrant seated. Then the silence began. Like a chain of locked arms it started with each one and spread around through all the others in the room. The silence held them all as close together as a safety rope connecting a line of mountain climbers.

Finally, a figure in the row directly before her stood up. A large black cloak and a pointed green hood exactly like all the others; then it began to move down the aisle. The stride was masculine. In silence the figure halted behind the speaker's stand; the hands rested invisibly on it. Then, a deep male voice said, 'This is what it takes, in our time, for one serious person to talk openly with another.'

The man who had begun the meeting was obviously The Teacher. 'We must wear masks,' he said, 'in order to let ourselves go. Living now in this country, at this time, we are doomed. What we try to be, what we think we must pretend to be, destroys any real self we might possess. That is why I compel you to wear a cloak and a hood. We use them to strip off the false front that keeps us hidden under

the surface. The fact that our best selves are locked in the cellar – never to see the light of day – is the sickness that we have to combat. This is what we are here to fight together. And the strength we derive from such a spiritual exercise as this helps us to overcome that sickness. Here we are each anonymous.

‘Anonymous insofar as our outer selves are concerned. For it is the outer self which suffers the disease. It is the inner self which can bring health.

‘What is the disease? You know. Oh, yes, you know it in the head. But do you allow yourself to feel it in the heart? Some people have other failings. Some people are liars, thieves, alcoholics. Some people are dictators and some people are slaves. Some people are sadists, masochists, narcissists. Some people are jealous and corrupt and destructive. And they know it! Oh, they know it in the head, all right. But do they know it in the heart?’

Now the Teacher’s voice became low and confidential. ‘We . . . all of us here . . . are suffering from a disease. We know the name for it. We are *bourgeois*!’

Lavinia felt as humiliated as if she suddenly found herself sitting naked among all the others. Her face grew warm but a chill ran all the way down her arms. ‘He has found me out,’ she thought.

‘This is our disease,’ The Teacher went on. ‘This is what keeps us doing our jobs well instead of cultivating our best selves. This is what keeps us responsible to spouses we no longer love. This is what makes us dependable for children we don’t even like. This is what keeps us respectable members of a society we no longer respect. This is what keeps us out of jail. This is what keeps us polite and proper and, therefore, characterless. This is what keeps us, in a word, deadly middle class.

‘We know what it means to suffer from being Other-Directed. We know what it is to be victimized’ by the appeal to The Golden Mean. We suffer the cancer of Mediocrity.

We are driving ourselves headlong into the rigor-mortis of *total conformity*.

'But . . .' The Teacher's voice now became intimate and consoling, ' . . . this malady is not incurable. In the past few years, thousands throughout the country, hundreds here in New York alone, have discovered that, even when they have considered themselves hopeless, incurable bourgeois: there is hope! It is not impossible to regain sanity and health. It is not impossible to become *special*!

Lavinia sensed the words 'to become special' fondling her and warming her. Her limbs were more relaxed now, but her heart beat faster. The Teacher's voice continued in its rich, warm tones, all kindness and sincerity.

'There *is* hope. On one condition! If . . .' he paused, ' . . . if it makes you suffer enough! If it is driving you to the brink of death. If it is killing all that is unique and wonderful in your individual soul: and your *heart* will let itself know it! If you will allow yourself to recognize that your inner life is being kicked and beaten black and blue, mangled and tortured to the last breath; if you will let yourself admit that your essence is being smothered to death. Then and only then, then and at that very moment, you have found the key to escape. You can find the new life. ~~You~~ you can bring your inner life up to the surface. You can realize your own best self.

'Oh, yes. Granted: we must admit that we will never be able to forget the past. We will never be "unstained," never "pure". We have a *past*. But we're not ashamed to admit it. That's where the cure begins. What has kept us from being all the wonderful things we hoped for? We mustn't be ashamed to admit it; we were wallowing in . . .' he brought out the last word with a burden of sorrow: ' . . . in being *ordinary*.

'But there is something in us that calls out "I wan't to live my own life! I want to be myself, not just a copy of everybody else. I want to be *different*! I want to be *special*!"'

'It is not easy. But it is not impossible. Of course, we have relapses. But we are here to help each other. That is the whole aim and justification of this organization. We learn first that we must face ourselves, admit to ourselves that we are' – his voice caught for a moment – 'yes, *we are bourgeois*. Once we recognize the unmistakable truth about ourselves we are on the road to recovery. Despite back-sliding and falling off the wagon, we have seen the sign posts to the right direction. This is the point at which we need the help of others. Of other people who have had the same experience. This is why the great geniuses, the saints, the heroes can't help us. Such persons may try to reason with us, persuade us, convince us to be our best selves; but they can't understand us. They don't know the conflict we suffer because they haven't experienced it from the inside. *They've always been different!* They've always known themselves to be special. They've never known the conflict – being torn between the desire to be special and the eternal pull, the miserable, exhausting, wasteful, deadly drag to be just like Everybody Else.

'This is why the organization of Bourgeois Anonymous came into existence. So that people like you and me, who are trying to overcome this malady, can meet with others of our kind who can sympathize in the fullest sense – feel what we feel – and can help us through the period of adjustment, first, and then be there for us to call upon in times of crisis. That's what we're here for and that's what we do.' He paused and took a deep breath.

'Now I'm going to turn the meeting over to the floor. Those of you who have been here before know what I mean. Anyone who wants to may now address the meeting; is invited to address the meeting. If you have been here before and you feel that you have benefited from the service of the organization – stand up and tell us about it! Tell us all, so that you may strengthen the experience in yourself and, at the same time, help serve as an example to others, as a

symbol of hope to those who may still think themselves hopeless.

'If you are cured, or at least struggling successfully toward a cure, then stand up and speak out so you can learn more about yourself in the telling, and the rest of us can profit by, take counsel from, your experience. Those of you who are here for the first time, you who may have little faith in the possibility of your own recovery, who may doubt that there is any hope for *you*, stand up and tell us your story. You are anonymous here. We cannot harm you in any way. The only thing we can do for you is to begin to change you for the better.'

Lavinia felt singled out. How could she know if there was anyone else here for the first time? She felt as called upon as if The Teacher had pointed his black cloaked arm unmistakably at her alone. She remained perfectly immobile. Even her eyes did not move behind the slits in the hood.

Then she heard: 'I'd like to say a few words.' With immense relief she turned to see a figure rising at the end of the row behind her. He was tall, and the black robe fell back so close against him that he looked thin as a board. The green hood stood up very straight and his voice seemed ingratiating but muffled. 'This isn't the first time I've been to these meetings. But this is the first time I feel strong enough in the change that has taken place in me to tell my story.'

He cleared his gravelled throat and, receiving a nod of approval from The Teacher, began:

'I've been a chemist all my life. All my research is paid for by a chemical corporation that hopes to use the discoveries of pure science for the advantages of mass market products. That arrangement suits me fine. They pay the bills and they leave me alone. In the laboratory, that is.

'We live in a suburb – my wife and three daughters – about a fifteen-minute drive from the plant, across the river in Jersey. I'm devoted to my wife and family, but as soon as we settled down in this suburb my wife began making more

and more demands on my time. "You're well enough established here now," she'd say. "You don't have to work ten hours *every* day!" She wanted me to be more sociable.'

His voice grew sad now. 'That's when it started. Far from being miserable, I found that I actually *liked* playing games with my little girls. I enjoyed golf. I loved having friends over for an evening, parties, bridge . . . In fact, I used to leave my laboratory sometimes as early as five, instead of my usual 8 p.m. Sometimes I'd just go on a bender. I wouldn't even go to the laboratory at all on a Saturday. I'd take the family on a picnic, or go to a ball game. Once we even went to visit a museum together. I'd stay up so late at night over bridge, or talking with friends or relatives, that I'd be too tired to get to the lab before eight or eight-thirty!

'But I knew all along it couldn't last. A chemist has to work at it ten hours a day, six days a week if he's to keep up with new developments. Six months off from steady work in the field and you'd be ruined for life! You'd *never* catch up!

'I knew I was headed for it. Taking an interest in the way the house looked, for example. Why, I even once went shopping with my wife to buy her a new hat! Believe me, it's not easy to confess this, but . . . I really got to care about my golf game.' His voice broke for an instant. 'You see . . . I had come to feel that I *ought* to enjoy life the way ordinary people do.

'Finally I had a breakdown; I agreed to take a vacation. When we got married we were too poor to take a honeymoon trip, so we planned to make up for it then. We took the children to my in-laws, in Albany, and drove on up to Canada. We spent a whole week in Montreal, eating a lot of French food, seeing the sights, sleeping late. Even then I began feeling guilty. I knew I was on the wrong track. I knew I'd be done for if I didn't get a grip on myself.

'But my weakness was stronger than I was. I couldn't put it behind me. We kept on going. Enjoying ourselves.



Spending whole days alone with my wife! I knew I couldn't take it much longer. But we went on and on through the second week of oblivion. At Niagara Falls it finally caught up with me. I couldn't put up with being that happy. After all, I belonged somewhere else. But there I was; looking at a lot of water flowing over Rainbow Falls. It was appalling.

'My wife went to bed early that night, but I couldn't sleep. I walked around for a while and ended up in a bar. It was the turning point in my life.

'I guess I was looking pretty low, hanging my head over one drink after another, because the man sitting on the next bar stool asked me if there was anything wrong, and I said, "Plenty." So we started talking. I said, "I bet you'll think I'm crazy if I tell you this, but here I am having the time of my life, on a vacation with my wife, enjoying nothing but pleasure – and I can't stand it!

'And to my surprise, he said, "I can understand that perfectly. Practically the same thing happened to me . . . but, I got religion!"

'I might have known, I thought, and turned back to the drink I had in my hand. But he smiled then, and said, "I know what you're thinking, but you're ~~w~~rong". I listened, and discovered that I wasn't necessarily incurable. As soon as we got back from that (he swallowed hard over the word) "vacation", I started coming to these meetings.'

The green hood surveyed the group of cloaked and masked listeners. 'Coming here has made it possible for me to find myself again. In the past few months I have been able to take strength from the examples I've heard about here. I've been able to turn my back on golf; I don't play bridge at all. I don't care what the house looks like or what my wife wears.

'Well, I don't want to make it sound too good. I've had a few relapses. For example,' he said sadly, 'I took off one Saturday afternoon to ~~play with~~ the kids. I hadn't made a

clean break. But the last time I almost gave in, I was at the lab until nine one night, when I started getting the yen to go home and see the kids before they went to bed. I tried to fight it off, but I knew I couldn't make it by myself. So I called Bourgeois Anonymous. They sent over a man who stayed with me until I left the lab at midnight. He kept encouraging me. He kept talking me through the need until I could get over it. I had to sweat it out. He showed me that if I gave in, even a little bit, I'd be done for. I couldn't just take it or leave it. Some people can, maybe. But with us: when you've really been through it and reached the point of no return, then the only cure is total abstinence. I couldn't have made it without his help. And then he showed me that the best method for keeping on the spiritual wagon was to help others in the same situation. So now I've become a full-fledged member of B.A. I'm on call to go out and help others over a crisis – partly to show my gratitude for having been saved and partly to keep myself straight.' He added, triumphantly, 'Nowadays, it's practically the only time I talk to other people!' Abruptly, he sat down.

Relaxed, now, The Teacher, who had been standing at attention while the chemist spoke, leaned forward on the speaker's stand. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' he said 'that is what Bourgeois Anonymous is for. That is what we mean when we say it is not impossible to be cured. Let's have a round of applause for that testimony!' The sleeves of the black cloaks fluttered like wings in an assembly of crows.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' The Teacher cut short the applause, 'I want to call on anyone else here who might like to share his experience with us.'

Silence fell again for a moment. Then from the first seat of the first row a figure stood and turned: 'I've been here often and I've told my story many times,' – it was a woman speaking – 'but I'd like to tell it again. It does me good to go over it, and it may help those of you who haven't heard it before.' Her voice had clarity and a sharp edge. One sensed

an administrative mind. Yet there was a lilt to it also. Lavinia pictured a woman of thirty, with fine features and a handsome body.

'I was an orphan brought up in a convent. When I left there and left the Church, I felt that I had left behind me all the inhibitions of my adolescence. I went to a design school because from earliest childhood it seemed that I was destined to design dresses. As a child I used to make dolls which I would costume in immense wardrobes, all of which I sewed myself. I knew I was a born dress designer and my training confirmed me in that metier.

'During the past few years I have worked for a number of manufacturers, and am now the assistant-in-charge of the staff for one of the very best couturiers in the country. But until six months ago I was miserably unhappy, frustrated, insecure. And it wasn't the cocktail parties, the social and business engagements that disturbed me so deeply. It wasn't the senile dowagers and tasteless rich idiots. - But, I'm digressing.

'I know that I had to face one terrible fact: my best self was starving! This new awareness blocked out everything else . . . I couldn't concentrate on my work. Why? you ask.'

Someone in the audience had a short coughing spell, and was vigorously shushed. For a few moments the figure stood as if transfixed, then:

'Yes. . . . Well, it wasn't long before I realized that my fantasies were crowding me out. And I was powerless before them. You see,' she raised her arms in an attitude of despair, 'I was dreaming of a middle-class marriage. Of an overcrowded apartment. Of being too tired to make love more than once a week. Of fighting and crying and getting hysterical over the monthly budget. Of scrimping and saving to buy a new high-fi set, and then not listening to it. Of raising children who, no matter how cute or how sweet they were occasionally, drained all of my ingenuity and my energy and left me useless. I dreamed of them growing up and leav-

ing me; of giving myself to the League of Women Voters, to garden clubs, and inviting aging friends to luncheons.'

The sad melody of her voice was almost a whine now. 'I tried to dream of a hero. Lord, how I tried. A rich, charming, erudite man who would whisk me away into luxury. But it was only the middle-classed ones who fit the reveries and the fantasies. The poor, ordinary, love-me-and-care-for-me-like-a-mother-except-on-Saturday-night type. As my daydreams and my nightdreams of a middle-class marriage became stronger, I realized that I was growing more and more susceptible to accepting one of the many proposals I got. My fantasies were putting my whole career into jeopardy. If they had been merely romantic I wouldn't have taken them seriously; but they were . . .' her voice seemed to blush, ' . . . they were *ordinary*. In other words, I was, in the essence of my private life – bourgeois!

'If something hadn't happened to me, I'm sure I would have fallen off the cliff. Everything in my soul was driving me to the abyss of middle-class mediocrity.'

A black kid glove came up from the cloak to press against her lips for a moment. Then it steadied the hood on her head.

'Six months ago,' she continued with more equanimity, 'I met the new man in charge of public relations for the house where I work. I found him very attractive and I began going out with him. After the theatre one evening, he came in for a nightcap at my apartment. Somehow, he actually asked me the question, "Exactly what do you want out of life?" And that simply opened the locks of my heart and the whole truth poured out in a flood. My inner conflict drenched him with the pathetic truth. I knew I could be great, if I stuck to it; but everything was dragging me away to the cemetery of statistics.

'It was then that he told me of how he had suffered a similar conflict. He was married and no longer loved his wife; he couldn't leave her. They were Catholic. But worse than that he was bourgeois. He was afraid of having affairs

with other women. Until he became a member of Bourgeois Anonymous. They cured him. After that, he began having one adulterous affair after another. He was free! And I wanted to be free.

'I didn't want to fling myself into the pit of a middle-class marriage. Any woman can do that. But I could make *a name* for myself. There was a career for me, accomplishment, fame! I really have something to contribute to modern designing. I wanted to fight my way to the top. But I couldn't, as long as I was plagued with the desire to be ordinary.

'He saw this. He helped get me through the blackest period. He talked me through it. He comforted me. He brought me here for the first time and introduced me to others who were trying to throw off the same curse. Eventually he and I became lovers. *I* had been freed to enjoy adultery, too! There's no stopping me now . . .' She nodded her thanks, threw her head back, and then turned to seat herself into anonymity again.

The gathering burst into applause; the noise was like the rush of coal going down a basement chute. But before the run was over, one of the members had leaped to his feet and was flailing his arms about.

'What do you know?' he cried. 'Any of you!'

Every hood in the room had pivoted in his direction.

The Teacher stepped forward quickly. 'My good man—'

'Yes, yes' – the hood nodded vigorously – 'I know. Discipline. The rules. But weren't any of you afflicted in childhood? Adolescence? Haven't any of you known the nightmare of going to sleep each night peacefully, longing for nothing – not fame, not glory, not excellence? But content because you had money in the bank and thought that the police were on your side – and figured that that takes care of everything?'

Several members began to shift uneasily in their seats, squeaking, coughing, blowing their noses, and whispering.

'Yes,' the speaker continued, his voice grim now, determined. 'I was interested in the fast buck from the beginning. I am a writer by profession, but I never considered myself an artist. The little magazines never appealed to me. I didn't even know they existed. I wasn't interested in winning prizes for having critics try to figure out what I was saying or why I said it that way.

'When I was nineteen I sent a story off to the *Saturday Evening Post*, full of gush about a rich girl and a poor but wonderful boy; that got me \$750.00. Since then I've never sold a story for less. I was a hack at the age of twenty-one.

'My folks were middle-class; everybody they knew was middle-class, too. They had wanted me to be a doctor or a lawyer – of course – so they were somewhat disappointed by my becoming a writer. It made them feel uneasy – as if I took dope or made book on the horses. But as long as I was a success, they were satisfied. They never quite got over the idea of my not having a steady job, but as long as I was making more money than most of the people they know, that made things fine.

'Well, I didn't know any better. Their world was okay in my book, so I followed all their principles without even realizing it. I struck out for the main chance. And writing junk came nice and easy. The *Saturday Evening Post* paid, *Collier's* paid, *Redbook* paid, the *Ladies' Home Journal* paid. Publishers paid for it. The public paid for it. Eight books published in the past ten years, and an average of \$20,000.00 a year. You get the picture? I was a great middle-class success.

'But then something wild happened. One of my short stories won the O. Henry Prize. Kenneth Burke wrote an essay on me in the *Kenyon Review*. Colleges began asking me to lecture. The New School invited me to give a course in their writers' workshop. And,' a note of modesty suddenly appeared in his voice, 'my life changed. For the first time, I began to take myself seriously.

'That is, first I began to take my writing seriously. I began to read. Literature! Sometimes I would read as many as three books a day. I went through all the novels of Tom Wolfe and then I got on to Thomas Mann and Henry James and Kafka and Proust and Joyce and Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy and Turgenev and Hemingway and Faulkner and Gide and a couple of tons of plays from the Greeks and the Romans all the way up to *Godot*. Well, sure, I had read a couple of them in school. But I hadn't taken them seriously before. They were old stuff.

'But now when I got started, I knew all about my own little techniques, so I could see how much more these guys were doing. And I found out that half of them never made pocket money out of their books. They may have wanted to; but they kept on writing even when they didn't make a cent out of it. They were artists!

'So then I had to take a long, hard look at myself, and I could see I wasn't an artist.' The note of modesty had been replaced by remorse.

'I tried to go on doing the stuff I made my living at. But the heart had gone out of it. Editors began sending them back telling me I'd become condescending. The *Ladies' Home Journal* rejected one story with the criticism that it was "too aesthetic". My agent had a fit of hysteria, and reminded me of how much he had to sell to pay his office expenses. That was the beginning of last year. So I kept knocking out the stuff that success is made of. But I went all dead inside. I knew that I was a failure. And I felt doomed to a vacuum of mediocre success. The money kept coming in.

'Then, one afternoon, when I'd gone through a stack of Greek tragedies, it hit me: if those playwrights could be artists and popular successes, why not me? So I racked my brain for a new twist on an old theme because that's what everybody wants. It's like getting two for the price of one. That's what people go for most. And that's what's being done again. Joyce did it with *Ulysses*. Cocteau did it with

*Oedipus*. Virginia Woolf did it with English history. Mann did it with *Faust*. Everybody's doing it.

'I knew then just where the rub hit me. I wanted to write a novel like *Don Quixote*. Only – it would be the story of an old ranger somewhere in Nebraska or Utah, who spent his whole life reading Westerns and seeing cowboy movies, and who was filled up to his eyes with the code of honour of the Wild West. He'd try to live by this code and get screwed. Like being ridiculed by all the Buick-driving farmers, and all the swimming-pool-owning oilwell people. He'd drive around on a beat-up horse and mistake some hotrod for a charging buffalo. He'd mistake whores on the make for ladies in distress and get beaten up by their pimps. He'd mistake ministers for holymen and lay his lasso before the altar only to get kicked out of the church.'

There was some laughter in the audience. Even Lavinia was smiling broadly.

'I had it all mapped out,' he continued. 'I wanted to call it *Don Coyote*.' Then his voice dropped. 'But I knew I never would. Even my publisher got the shakes when I told him about it. "You got a good thing going, boy," he said. "Forget it. Stick to the real thing." So I stuck.

'But I was lousy with conflict behind every paying word I wrote. After a while I knew I had to bust out – re-evaluate – but every time I thought about old Coyote, I got paralyzed. It was too late for me. My only good book would never be written.

'Finally, I decided to kill myself. I went over to Bedloe's Island and climbed up to the top of the Statue of Liberty. I thought I'd throw myself out of her eyes – or wherever the opening was. It would be beautiful. The only indecent thing – the only genuinely non-bourgeois thing – I'd ever do.

'But just as I lifted my leg, somebody called out, "Wait a minute!" and pulled my leg in. I asked him what the hell right he had to pull my leg like that, but he looked sympathetic, so I told him the whole ugly story, in perfect



prose (I mean, what difference did it make now). But the worse the story got, the happier the guy looked; and I wondered if he were a sadist or something.

'Then he told me he was a member of Bourgeois Anonymous and that the Statue of Liberty was his beat. I thought he was some kind of nut, but I went to one of the meetings with him anyway (I mean, it's good for a writer to know things) and listened to how other guys were saved. And I thought *I* was far gone!' He allowed himself a snicker of amusement.

'I'll admit I've had a few lapses. One day I sat down and a short story came out that sold to the *Saturday Evening Post* for \$7,000.00. But I've been controlling myself. I call on B.A. now whenever that kind of conflict comes over me.

'The writing isn't going very easily, but I've been reading the biographies of great writers, and it never did go easily for any of them. You have to suffer. I've started, now. I'm determined. I'm going to suffer like I've never suffered before!' He sat down amidst a volley of applause and cheers.

It seemed to Lavinia that the green light of the room had become clearer, as if there was a phosphorescence in the black robes. There was some quality of brightness, like the cleanliness of fresh paint, on all the painted hoods. The world, it seemed to her, was coming into focus. Her exhilaration made her feel horns blowing inside of her, people shouting, bells ringing. But as the swelled emotion began to ebb, she was shocked to realize that she actually was hearing horns blow and bells ring. There were people shouting – on the sidewalk just beyond the windows of the wall behind her.

The Teacher grasped the speaker's stand. His anxious voice rushed through the sentences: 'I'm terribly sorry that we have to cut the meeting short. It's New Year's Eve, and we are on a main street leading toward Times Square, that Elephant's Graveyard of the Old Year.

'It's not that I have anything against the ceremony of the

New Year. Every ritual which reminds us of Nature, of The Spirit, of the objective order and ineluctable demands of the universe, whatever kind of Power you take it to be, or whatever name you call it by – as long as it brings our consciousness in touch with it again – is a good thing. It's just that I can't stand a lot of loud noise.

'But I would like to conclude the meeting with a few remarks about such meetings in general. Many times I have been asked why we should meet like this at all. Isn't it enough, people wonder, just to be able to call on a fellow member at the time of crisis? Why get together and tell our stories? Is it just to encourage new people to become members?

'Let me put it to you as simply as I can. The primary duty of each of us is to himself or herself. But we are not isolated; we are not unconnected with everyone else in the world. We are not hermits. We are not each of us such a genius of humanity that we can become our best selves without working at it in connection with other people. That's the way it has always been. Whether it's the romantic with his lover, the religious with his church, the Communist with his fellow revolutionaries. We become our best selves through close contact with others: like us and different from us; but aimed toward the same goal. That is why the primary unit for action is always the cell; a *group* working toward a common end.

'Most important of all are those unofficial and unrecognized, or even illegitimate, cells. Whether it's the little girl and her music teacher, the unmarried lovers, the homosexual and his private world populated exclusively by other homosexuals, the people who work in the same office with you, the other men in your army unit, the other women in your union or in your canasta club – whatever group, no matter how large or how small, which happens really to bring about the development of the highest grade of humanity of which *you* are especially capable: it is always, and

necessarily, in relationship with other people that your own best self comes into being.

'Bourgeois Anonymous is such an organization with a common goal. It is, necessarily, constructed of cells. The strength derived from working together, as we do, is greater than the strength any one of us can take from only one other of us. It is the safety of numbers. As we each work together for the good of others, we achieve more of what is best in ourselves.

'Now just let me get a few announcements out of the way.

'Next week we will be meeting at eleven, rather than breaking up at that time.

'The collection box will be at the exit door as usual. Any contributions will be gratefully accepted. That money is primarily used to maintain the switchboard for Crisis Calls. If anyone here is unfamiliar with the number to dial when in need, it is very simple to remember. Just dial the letters: D-E-S-P-A-I-R. We'll have a Bourgeois Anonymous member on duty at any time rush to your side as quickly as possible.

'Next time, of course, we will not be cut short by anything like the New Year's celebration, and we can look forward to encouraging new members, or friends ~~here~~ for the first time, to speak their minds so that we may try to help them.'

Lavinia felt the elation of having been made a wonderful promise – a party to be given in her honour, a secret lovers' tryst.

The Teacher clapped his hands together. 'Go, now, and fight the good fight,' he said. 'We can win. Remember: being bourgeois is not incurable. We don't have to be Inner-directed or Other-directed. We, too, may be Autonomous. Adjusted of the world, *unite!* – you have nothing to lose but your adaptation!'

The great gong sounded.

The shiver that ran through Lavinia was like flash lightning. She knew that she had found her *cell*. At the same

time she was disappointed that the meeting had come to an end. She would have liked it to go on and on. But even as she was aware of these emotions, she watched The Teacher come away from the speaker's stand with the last words: 'Happy New Year and May the Spirit be with You.' All of the figures began to rise from their bridge chairs. 'Happy New Year,' some called out. Others repeated, 'May the Spirit be with You.' In an instant The Teacher was lost in the crowd. He was just another black-robed and green-hooded figure. Lavinia hadn't even noticed his 'clay feet'. Behind which of the slots in which green pointed hood were the eyes of The Teacher? Which black cloak concealed the golden heart, the warm and kindly voice, of the man she admired, now, as she did no one else alive?

The figure standing next to her pulled at Lavinia's sleeve and whispered, 'It's over.' Lavinia remembered Googie's voice, and smiled, inside her hood. 'How do you feel?' Googie asked.

After a long pause, she named the great truth – 'Different!'

## Chapter Two

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GOOGIE and Lavinia hurried down the steps of the building and along the street, arm in arm, their bodies tense with delight and braced against the cold, communicating their satisfaction to each other with a hug of the arm or a shoulder quickly pressed affectionately against the other's arm, moving briskly and purposefully until Lavinia suddenly stopped and asked, 'Where are we going?'

'Well, you have your party!'

'But I couldn't go, after *this* . . .'

'Why not?'

'Things are different now, Googie.'

'Like how?' They were moving again. 'I think we're safer heading for the subway.'

'It's different because my whole attitude has changed. I don't have to go along being "a nice kid", I never wanted to go to this party. A New Year's Eve party in costume,' Lavinia said contemptuously, 'is about as mature and sophisticated . . . is about *me* . . . as my joining a country club would be right now. Look: I've resisted going to the cell meetings with you, haven't I? I didn't believe they could really do me any good, did I? Darling-Googie, I never thought that I had a chance to get away from the rut, or to be my real self. But, Googie, I'm going to change! I can see

that it isn't hopeless.' She stood still, threw out her arms wide, and took a deep breath of the cold air: 'I'm free! You were right, I'm not a prisoner!'

'Let's keep moving,' Googie urged.

'I'm going to escape!'

'I'm freezing.'

Two young men walked quickly toward them. Each one grasped one of Lavinia's outstretched hands, twirled her around in a circle, shouted, 'Happy New Year!' and went right on walking past them.

'Lavinia, sweetie, let's get the hell out of here.'

Back in their two rooms on Sheridan Square, Lavinia flopped down on the sofa, her coat still on. Googie hung up hers neatly, wiped the fog off her glasses with a dishtowel and poured a ladylike glass of sherry for each of them. 'Sip this.'

'Oh, I do wish you a Happy New Year, *dear* Googie. I'm terribly grateful to you. I had no idea that I'd be so impressed by the meeting.'

'Well, you know they've made a lot of difference to me...'

'I do, Googie; I hadn't realized what it would be like.'

'You never do until you try it for yourself.'

They drank to each other.

'We're on the right track, Googie, we're going to come through all right. I've been so bourgeois all my life that I didn't think this feeling would be possible. But now I can feel it in my bones.' She paused. 'I mean: I can feel it in my muscles, or my viscera. You *see*, there's a typical cliché. I never felt anything "in my bones". I just say it because it's so easy to talk like everybody else, to use all the conventional phrases, whether they mean anything to you or not!'

'Don't get carried away. You have to speak English.'

'But one doesn't have to speak Cliché.'

'Now let's talk about your party.'

'It's not *my* party; I certainly don't want to go; and it's too late.'

'You worked for a week making your costume; they expect you to come; and it's supposed to go on until breakfast.'

'I hate the costume; they only invited me because I work for them; and I need a good night's sleep.'

'You love the costume; they're fascinating people; and you're too excited to sleep tonight anyhow.'

'Fascinating people!' Lavinia laughed. She swallowed the rest of the sherry, took off her coat, and lit a cigarette. 'Darling, they're snobs. How can you be intrigued by them?'

'They've accomplished something. They started out with nothing . . .'

'Forty years ago.'

' . . . and they've built the most powerful magazine chain in the country. They know everybody who's doing anything worthwhile, and they . . .'

'Try to buy and sell them. Besides, what's this about "starting with nothing?"' His ancestors came over on the Mayflower and the little seeds of those flowers must have given him fifty million at the age of twenty-one. She's the daughter of a French Count. Well, stepdaughter.'

'I meant they started without a single magazine and now they have – what – sixteen? Eighteen? It was all their ideas, their initiative, their imagination. Lavinia: they're *creative* people!'

'What they've created most of is antagonism. They're slave drivers. They can't even stand each other. You ought to see them at board meetings! It's all they can do to be civil to each other. Moreover,' and now she became vindictive, 'they're epitomes of the bourgeoisie. They represent everything that one ought to hate. They abuse people. They never take anyone else's feelings into consideration. They wring you dry and then throw you away. They're such egomaniacs they can't even admit *each other's* usefulness. They. . . .'

'Does that sound like the description of a bourgeois?' Googie asked, condescendingly, her arms crossed and her glasses resting professorially on the button-tip of her nose.

'No.' Lavinia said, slumping back on the sofa. 'It doesn't.'

'*They're not* middle class, Lavinia. You mustn't make the mistake of applying the word "bourgeois" to everything you happen to dislike just because it isn't likable. Everybody has some bourgeois traits; they can't help it. The Queen of England is probably the most bourgeois woman alive. A lot of bums and drunks on skidrow are probably more bourgeois than either you or I. But let's not forget: there are *three* categories of people. The outcasts, the bourgeois, and the incasts. Remember those circles I told you about that The Teacher drew on a blackboard one evening? The middle circle is constituted of the bourgeoisie. They're the majority. Then the outer circle represents the proletariat, drunks and all that – the outcasts. The inner circle stands for the natural aristocrats. They're just as much thrown out by the middle class as the bums are. But they're "kicked upstairs"; they're the in-group of the people who've got it made. They can afford to be themselves; their real selves. The bums can't *afford* it; they just can't pretend to be anything else. It's only the bourgeois who can't afford to be himself and can't do anything but pretend to be something he's not. So even if you dislike the Wheelwrights, let's get this straight: that doesn't make them bourgeois. They're "natural aristocrats." They abuse people; they never consider anyone else's feelings; but they're geniuses; they're imaginative; they're *creative*; they're got it made; and I'm dying to know what the inside of their apartment looks like.'

'At last it comes out! Now that *is* the prize bourgeois thought of the evening.' She slapped both hands down on her knees.

'Well, I'm sorry, Lavinia.' Googie nearly sulked. 'I have been looking forward to hearing about it. You've never been



invited there before, and God knows, the stories make it sound unique. Have you ever been to anybody's party at River House before?

'To see how the big rich live? That kind of snobbism is *the worst* bourgeois longing . . .'

'You have to know what you're fighting in order to beat it! Oh Christ – Lavinia. I don't even know what I'm saying now. Look, darling: do this for me, will you? For *my* sake? We'll interpret it later.'

Lavinia laughed.

Googie burst into tears.

'I'm terribly sorry, Googie,' Lavinia said, putting her arm quickly around her roommate's shoulder. 'I had no idea it was this important to you.'

'It is. I'm ashamed of it. I practically gag saying it, but that's the truth – it is! I'm not all cured yet. I don't go to the cell meetings just for a booster shot. I'm bourgeois; I know it. Through and through. I'd love to know how the big rich live. Even if only through your eyes. I'd love it, do you hear me! I can despise myself for it – the longing, the envy, the desire. But I've got to have it. At least, right now, Lavinia. I hope it won't last, that I'll be able to get over this sort of thing in the near future. But for the present time, Lavinia, I simply do have this longing and you're my one link with that world. Don't break that link, Lavinia. Go to the Wheelwrights' party. Enjoy yourself. Observe! Have insights! Come back and tell me what it was like. Will you do that for me, for my sake?'

This is what the addiction is like, Lavinia thought, the tension and the need. Could *she* hold out any better if the tables were turned? How easy will it be for me, she asked herself, to throw off some bourgeois longing, all the more insidious for being cultivated over the long years without having been recognized as the poison that it is. And what would Googie do for me in such a case? 'Of course I'll go,' she said quietly. They both stood up and embraced;

then they marched together toward the bedroom closet to take out the mermaid costume.

The Wheelwrights' city home was a ten-room apartment overlooking the East River. They had two immense sitting rooms (His and Hers). The rosewood panelled doors between these rooms had been slid into hiding in the wall to open both salons simultaneously to the crowd. *His* living room was predominantly decorated by a collection of African masks, weapons, and ceremonial wood carvings, Eskimo bone sculpture and Polynesian artefacts. It amused Franklin Wheelwright to look at all the glowering, scowling and sneering or frightened faces of the primitive masks and call them 'My staff'. The vigour of the faces, the power of the muscles, the unashamed joy in genitalia expressed in these works of primitive art, filled him with delight. He had been psychoanalyzed by a Freudian.

*Her* living room walls were softly draped with golden damask brocade. Above the fireplace was a genuine Luca della Robbia Madonna and Child, brilliantly glazed blue and white peace and grandeur in a circle of fruits of the earth forever frozen in sugar-coated ceramic. On side tables there was a variety of Buddhas - Indian, Ceylonese, Khmer, Japanese. Some two dozen hand-illuminated illustrations from a medieval Bestiary, framed in black velvet, hung on one wall. The gold and blue of the oriental - 3 were repeated harmoniously in the bouquets of yellow chrysanthemums and irises, symmetrically balanced in vases at each end of the sofa. On another wall there was a large and intricate Tibetan mandala, and next to it a Chinese scroll of a yin and yang motive. She had been psychoanalyzed by a Jungian.

When Lavinia shed her coat in the foyer, she unpinned the train of her sheath skirt from behind her knees and a cotton-padded flipperly-tail of green sequins fell to the floor with a thud. She was transformed into a half-fish maiden of shimmering scaly blue and green from the waist down. From the

waist up, a blouse of billowy white and sea-green made her appear half under water and foam. She wore a narrow black velvet mask, like a thief. Her eyes stared out through the slits, observant and unrevealing as the eyes of an Egyptian cat statue.

Beyond the foyer, in the two sitting rooms various crowds congregated, but the group immediately before her was not thick. No more than eight celebrants stood about in the low-ceilinged entrance room. One man in black-face and black leotards smoked what appeared to be a white cigar. There was a girl costumed as a belly dancer; another woman was dressed as Camille; and a squat paunchy sweating man, absurd as Charlie Chaplin. Others – a pink angel among them – moved through the room carrying loaded buffet plates in their hands. A large Negro woman dressed as a red devil suddenly appeared before Lavinia with a tray of champagne glasses at breast level. As she sipped the cool fizzy wine from the tulip-shaped glass, Lavinia's anxiety began to be calmed and she appreciated again, for the second time this evening, the gratitude she felt for being hidden behind a mask. Not more than half the guests within her sight still had on their masks. The others must have removed them at midnight. A smile began to play through her lips. 'What a difference,' she thought, 'between the cell meeting and this party. People concealed their "façades" there in order to let their *best selves* have a chance to breathe freely. Here, they're using masks and wild get-ups as an excuse for letting their worst selves out of the basement.'

Precisely at the moment Lavinia conceived this thought, a masked man dressed as a lion tamer goosed the belly dancer, who screamed joyfully and leaped into the air. Camille clapped her hands in glee, Lavinia's lips curled down in disgust. She became conscious that a fellow in the costume of a space man was staring at her, and she meandered into the long dining-room off to one side.

Coloured spaghetti-like streamers were strewn about the

floor, along with small paper balls of red, white, and blue. Betty Wheelwright had ordered them from Paris, at the last minute; air freight. The main body of the party must have been standing around the great oval walnut table when the midnight hour struck. It was here that they pelted each other with New Year Cheer – *a la française*. Lavinia felt like an archeologist reconstructing the scene. The debris was chaotically swimming in schools and floating into shoals across the green surface of the marble floor. The buffet seemed miraculously spared. Either there had been an angelic intercession, or a new display of unsullied meats and fish, salads and cheeses and all sorts of other goodies had replaced the spotted ones, while, between the trays, the table was polka dotted with bright confetti. As if it were a form of Scrabble – the whole scene spelled out the word ‘Gaiety.’

Betty and Franklin Wheelwright were among the least gay and carefree, happy and comfortable people alive. Lavinia recognized them without reflecting about it for an instant, although they both kept their masks on. There was a short, chubby old woman dressed like a plump miniature Marie Antoinette, her mirror-mask as flashy as a lighthouse, speaking apparently very quietly and confidentially into thin air, while at her side a tall, well-built, aging man in the costume of George Washington, powdered wig and all, rested his hand on one knee and bent over sharply toward her to catch the words in his cocked left ear. She had noticed the same tableau played a thousand times in different clothing. As Franklin Wheelwright’s hearing began to fail, the gods had so ordained it, in equal proportion to the loss of his hearing, his wife’s power of speech declined. Betty Wheelwright’s would-be ethereal voice gradually became lower and raspier, as painful as the sound of two ragged shreds of sandpaper whispering against each other. The battle appeared to be constant and fought with relish toward the finish. Each of them, it was assumed, secretly hoping that the other would lose first. Which would it be? Would he

become completely deaf before she became completely mute, or vice versa?

Gazing at them as openly as she had, Lavinia did not recognize at first the significance of the crooked finger. Betty Wheelwright, gazing just as ardently at her, was motioning Lavinia to join them. The flippers of her costume swept the coloured balls and streamers along behind her heels as Lavinia manoeuvred among the guests to the opposite side of the table and came abreast of the Wheelwrights. 'Happy New Year,' she smiled. They did not shake hands.

'Where did you have that costume made?' Betty Wheelwright asked hoarsely. 'Is it European?'

Lavinia suppressed the lie that came readily to her throat.

'No,' she said. 'I made it myself.'

'Splendid,' Mrs Wheelwright rasped out drily. 'Are you having a splendid time?'

'Yes.'

Franklin Wheelwright said 'Good,' which concluded the interview; he took his wife's padded elbow in one hand and began to steer her toward the door. Lavinia felt as abandoned and stupid as if she were the bronze mermaid on that rock in the Danish Harbour. 'They haven't the faintest idea who I am! Of all the disgusting absurdities,' she thought. 'First of all I'm certain that they didn't recognize me. They might as well be blind as deaf and dumb, for all they can tell of what goes on in the world around them. *Their* world. And secondly, there for all the good world to know is the measure of that female's mind: "Is it European?" If it were European it would be within the realm of possibility. Exactly like Mother asking about the religion of a boy I had a date with. If he wasn't Protestant there was no further question; only if he were, did the degrees of hierarchy come into full play. But if it isn't European, why bother to talk about it? It had no future. Ah, how *passé* she is.' Lavinia thought. 'How pre-world war one. And this is what Googie wants to know about: a natural aristocrat, a genius, a creative person,

a woman "independent enough" to have been converted to Catholicism by Jacques Maritain, independent enough to be *herself* – even if the self is a caricature of Marie Antoinette.' She realized then how remarkably appropriate the costumes were for each of them. 'Franklin Wheelwright – father of the country. Dispenser of culture to the masses; dispenser of rewards to the elite. High, middle, and low brow all in one. A mind as easily adjustable to the occasion as background music. Pick your record and I'll play it for you on the victrola. A character like an inexhaustible library of phonograph records.' Lavinia shifted her attention to the many foods on the table, knowing that she had no desire to eat. 'How well the cliché "groaning board" applies,' she thought. 'How well *all* the clichés apply to this place and to these people. Nothing special. Nothing unique or even highly individual. Everything here and everybody here could be interchanged with a hundred other things or people and there would be no appreciable difference. To whom?' At that point she stopped thinking.

Lavinia wandered from the dining-room through the foyer and along a corridor (wallpapered with brilliantly framed etching and watercolours) to a library, and then to a barroom decorated like a British pub. Viennese waltzes lilted out of some concealed speaker. In the pub, the centre of attention was a trio of vigorous young men in the costumes of the Three Musketeers drinking stout from pewter mugs. One of them drew his sword and held it menacingly at her rhinestone bellybutton. Lavinia withdrew, dragging her mermaid tail behind her. She came to rest on the leather bench that formed a semicircle before the fireplace in Franklin Wheelwright's living-room. And she breathed a deep sigh of weariness.

The noise seemed to her the prime object of distress and ridicule. Despite the size of the rooms, everyone talked louder than one normally would, as everyone there appeared to be talking at once. And then there were the gestures:

the balancing of a glass in one hand and a cigarette in the other made even the most manly male appear effete, like statues of maidens with one foot in a cold river – their hands suddenly raised to elbow level in surprise. The women seemed merely powder puffs, no matter how ‘pretty’ the costume; they were either mounds of whipped cream or insubstantial heapings of dust like curls under a bed – gray and thin, soft, translucent.

A small and slender lout dressed as a Spanish grenadier, without a mask but with a scalloped black-pencilled moustache, sat down too close to Lavinia and asked, ‘Why in the Good Lord’s name are you alone, *ma belle*? Don’t answer that, I know. You’ve been waiting for me. Not just this evening but all your life. You’ve been waiting for me and now – Lord Priapus be praised – I’m here!’

Lavinia took the exquisite pleasure in refuge behind her mask to say, clearly and distinctly: ‘Drop dead!’

His mouth sagged. He stood up, removed his wide brimmed hat and made a flourished bent-kneed gallant’s bow before her; said the one word, ‘Bitch,’ and moved away between two wedges of the crowd. She watched his back as he was absorbed among the other colours and densities, thinking, ‘Pieces on a chess board. Lust moves two forward. Knight’s gambit traps him. The bishop commits suicide. . . . The game proceeds with other pieces.’ The Spanish grenadier was older than she had thought at first. From the lines in his face, she would have guessed forty-five or forty-eight. In fact, most of the people at the party were over forty. The Wheelwrights themselves were in their middle sixties. Some of these people must be personal friends of their ‘peer group’. But not necessarily. It was not impossible that they had no friends, no personal friends at all. It was all business with them, as she knew from the office. If a person were big enough, important enough, had made some contribution distinguished enough: the Wheelwrights would try to buy him. In their Book of Life, everyone of any value had his

price. If he didn't have, then he couldn't be of any value. There must be something radically wrong with him. He was, at the very least, anti-social.

Without realizing it, Lavinia said out loud, 'I'm bored.'

Like an echo she heard the phrase, 'I'm ignored.'

Leaning against the pillars of the fireplace behind her was the space man she had seen earlier. Inside the dome-like helmet he wore a mask of gauze across his eyes, but his nose and his mouth were visible and Lavinia saw that he was considerably younger than the Spanish grenadier. The silvery suit hid a lanky man. His arms were crossed over his chest. 'Well, you're not ignored now,' she said.

He smiled. 'Are you still bored?'

'It takes more time to recover from that. Sit down,' she added, moving backwards along the bench to make room for him in the corner. They were silent.

'Where did you get that costume?' she asked (and then smiled at the thought that she might have added, 'Is it European?').

'Through the lab. The Sitro lab. They make all sorts of electronic parts for missiles.'

'You mean it's the real thing?'

'Well, aren't you a real mermaid?'

'No; all jokes aside. Is this a space suit?' She stroked it gingerly.

'Let's say it's a fossil. An early version. They've changed a lot since this one was designed. They keep it around the lab the way medical schools keep skeletons around.'

'You keep saying "they" as though you don't quite belong to the lab.'

'I don't really. I have a contract for a particular job.' Despite the band of perforations, the transparent front of the space helmet began to grow vaguely foggy as he spoke.

'What do you do?'

'I'm a mathematician.'



Curious, Lavinia thought; a year or two ago, if a man had told me that he was a mathematician I would have dropped him like a red hot leper. Now the word "mathematician" almost sounds exciting. 'Aren't you terribly warm in that?'

'Not especially. I'm naked under this.'

Curious, Lavinia thought, that the statement should affect her as if two cold hands suddenly began to run over her body. She crossed her legs within the tight scaly skirt. 'Well, take off that helmet, at least.'

He did. His hair was crew cut and brown; his ears were small and flat against the head; his complexion was swarthy. 'What do you do?' he asked.

'I'm at Wheelwright. I'm the staff illustrator for *Fashion* magazine.'

'The only one?'

'I could take offence at that.'

'No offence meant. Isn't it a big magazine? How can one person handle it?'

'I see what you mean. No, I don't illustrate the whole magazine myself. I'm the only *staff* designer. The rest of the work is all done by free lance people.'

'What's your name?'

Lavinia opened her mouth, and her ears were more than a little surprised by what she said. 'Dear God – just this once let's talk like people who will never meet again. People who don't know each other and don't want to know each other. Let's just talk as though you were a man from outer space and I really am a mermaid, and never the twain shall meet.'

'But that wouldn't be real. I mean – that isn't true to life.'

'Doll-baby!' A husky voice shouted out of the masked face of a tyrolian woodchopper wearing lederhosen and a green knitted 'bracelet' around the calf of each bare leg. 'I'd recognize those fishy scales of yours anywhere.' Lavinia raised her arm to shake hands with Vincent Guarcello,

production manager of *Fashion* magazine. But he grasped her elbow as well as the hand and yanked her swiftly to her feet, throwing both arms around her in a bear hug. 'Come have a drink with me.'

Lavinia hardly had a moment to look over her shoulder. The space man had remained seated, glancing down at the helmet balanced on one knee. She had time to think, 'The game proceeds with other pieces.'

In the 'English pub', Vincent began: 'You don't know how rescued I feel. I haven't met *one* person I *know*. I mean, I hadn't until I made out your sexy figure.' He gave her a brotherly squeeze around the shoulder.

'Does anyone ever get to *know* anybody else, Vince?'

'You're sure you haven't had too much to drink already?' he asked, arresting his hands in mid-air above the champagne glasses at the bar.

She smiled, relaxed. 'As a matter of fact, I haven't had but one.'

'Elementary,' he explained, offering her a glass. 'Lack of sugar in the blood stream, irritates the nerve synapses. Makes you *think*.' He offered a toast, with satisfaction. 'Here's to adequate sugar in the blood stream.' She drank to that.

'Do you remember the fellow I was sitting with? The man in the space suit.'

'No, I only have eyes for you.'

'Did you recognize him?'

'Didn't see his face. He only had eyes for you.'

'Seriously?'

'Yes, he had.'

'No, I mean – seriously, don't you know who he is?'

'I don't. Ask Marie Antionette. She's the hostess.'

Lavinia stared at the walnut panelling of the small room, the race-track lithographs, the rough beamed ceiling, listened to the hisings, the boomings, the ticklings of conversations around them. 'Have you ever come to *know* anybody else, Vince?'

'I got to know my wife well enough to divorce her.'

Pause; then, 'Do you think that each time one gets to know someone else – I mean friends, lovers, family – divorce is inevitable?'

Vincent drained his champagne glass slowly. Then he said, 'Yes, I think so.'

'Why?'

'Because, my dear girl, life is real, life is earnest, and the grave is not its goal.'

'You can't ever be serious.'

'On the contrary. I can be so easily that it takes a considerable effort to resist that pitfall.' Lavinia noticed his broken nose and remembered that he had been a boxer in college, that he had won some medal for bravery in the Korean war, and that he had once told the editor of *Fashion* to go to hell and he hadn't been fired.

'All right, then. Why is it inevitable?'

Conspiratorially, he leaned toward her ear and whispered, 'This is my message for you – to start off the New Year right. To get to know another person "well enough", as you put it, is possible only if something in your life depends upon that other person. In other words, if somehow that other person has a power of life or death over you. And then you discover that no *one* other person can ever be everything you need. You are bound to be disappointed. All gods fail. Don't ever come too near to another person. All flames burn.'

He relaxed and took two fresh glasses for them. 'It's best just to keep a polite distance. Have fun. But be your own man (*you* should pardon the expression). If you don't expect too much, you won't be too hurt. No marriage – no divorce. Don't marry your friends; think of them as a wardrobe, *Fashion* girl. Wear them on the occasion that's right for you. If they wear well, keep 'em in good shape. If they don't, give 'em to the Salvation Army. Just don't worship them. Don't . . .'

'You sound too damned cynical.'

He placed his hand on his heart and announced pontifically, 'It is a far far better thing to be a cynic who is pleasantly surprised occasionally than to be an idealist who goes through life sore as hell.'

'Are those the only alternatives?'

'Absolutely.'

They were silent for an instant. 'That,' Vincent said, 'is a perfect exit line if I ever heard one.' And with no more to do, he gave her a quick kiss on the forehead and worked his way out of the room.

Abandoned, disquieted, Lavinia remained leaning against the bar. 'The game proceeds with other pieces . . . and sometimes even with none.'

She recognized the man standing on the other side of her. She had seen him frequently in the office elevator. He got off at the fourteenth floor which meant that he had something to do with *Thought* magazine. Lavinia was on the eighteenth floor. He had no mask on; his costume was that of a sixteenth century gentleman.

It was he who began the conversation. 'Haven't I seen you in the Wheelwright building?' He spoke softly with a slight Southern accent and he had the face of a dull-hand-some Southern type. The kind of man, Lavinia thought, who has a reputation for being brilliant because he doesn't talk much but looks knowing and keeps his lips set in a gently-superior all-enduring shadow of a smile.

'Yes, I'm on *Fashion*. You?'

'I edit *Thought*.'

'Oh - you must be Arthur Warden, then.'

'I must. . . ' he agreed. The smile became slightly deprecating, even more all-enduring. It did not appear as though he intended to continue the conversation.

Lavinia said, 'You know, I have a sneaking suspicion that everyone here works for the Wheelwrights. In fact, I imagine that what they did was to call the accounting

department, ask for a list of everyone on the payroll – who makes more than, say, seven thousand a year – and that was how they had the guest list made out.’

Arthur Warden snorted. ‘Clever . . .’ he drawled, and then added, ‘They decided to make it a costume party in order to see what each one thinks of his secret self.’

‘Does your costume reveal your secret self?’

‘Not in the least. As a matter of fact it deliberately represents my public self.’ The editor of *Thought* then confided, ‘I’m supposed to be dressed as Sir Francis Bacon – the world’s first publicist for other men’s scientific thought.’ He snorted again. Softly; modestly.

It occurred to Lavinia that Sir Francis was his secret self, and moreover that it was a typical misconception of employees in a ‘personal’ company to think that the Big Boss even gives a damn about their private lives, let alone the ‘secret self’.

Sir Francis continued, ‘Well, I suppose that everyone here does work for the Wheelwrights in one way or another. There are a lot of distinguished writers and painters, professors, government officials – they’ve all got money out of one of the magazines or another; and then there are the professional athletes and the movie stars . . .’ (Lavinia hated herself as soon as she felt the excitement of ‘Movie stars! *where? who?*’) They’re after the Wheelwrights for the publicity.’ He leaned closer to Lavinia’s ear and whispered, ‘See the fellow over there? Dressed as a Spanish grenadier. He’s the world’s foremost jockey. Won last year’s Kentucky Derby.’ He straightened up and sighed. ‘Bob Hope was here earlier. So was Vivian Leigh. Motley, wouldn’t you say?’ He agreed with himself. ‘Yes – motley. Colourful!’ He smiled benignly.

Lavinia decided that he was a stuffed turd.

‘*Thought* is always hot on the latest intellectual developments,’ she began. ‘Are you going to be doing an article on Fourgeois Anonymous one of these days?’

'What the devil is that?' Then he almost snorted; it came out 'Hay'.

'Apparently a movement – a sort of underground movement – to help people overcome having middle class souls.'

It was extraordinary to see how, under the force of habit, he drew a slender leather appointment book out of a pocket and made a note of the name in the same instant that he said, 'You must be kidding . . .'

'No, I'm not. Think of it this way: there are three categories of people. The bourgeois, the outcasts, and the incasts . . .'

'The *what*?'

'In-cast – opposite extreme from outcasts. The ones who . . .'

Arthur Warden sighed and put the notebook away.

Lavinia was grateful to him. If he hadn't been so blatantly bored, she might have let herself go and really said too much. Out of her thanks, she tried to begin a new conversation with 'What's this I hear about . . .'

when a woman with the face of a horse – this was not a costume – appeared without a mask: lantern jaw, thick lips with enough red on them to paint both her arms, great ugly circled bulging eyes and hair like the black stuffing of a Victorian mattress. Arthur Warden introduced this apparition as his wife, 'Mina', and behind the restrained charm of her polite smile, Lavinia privately relished the momentary joy of believing in God, in his omnipotence, and in justice in this life – as Arthur Warden, self-important stuffed turd that he was, had obviously been selected by the Lord to be among those who are clearly seen to do penance for their sins, publicly and through the course of a nice long unhappy private life. He had been saddled with the horse he so richly deserved.

'Ahthuh, dah-lin', she drawled, 'Ah seem to have misplaced Mr Bones.'

Lavinia asked, 'Was there a vaudeville act?'

'Not *that* Mr Bones, dah-lin' child.' Mrs Warden was dressed as a shepherdess; which pleased Lavinia. It confirmed her bovine head. 'Ah mean Mr Jeffrey Bones – boy genius. We brought him here, but I can't find him now. Do you think he might just be prone under some settee or table some-way-are?' It was worse when she smiled. It was absolutely beyond belief when she laughed: like uncovering a well.

Her husband explained: 'Jeffrey Bones is doing an article for *Thought* on the latest developments in the uses of computers. He was one of Norbert Wiener's most brilliant students. Now he's invented a new technique for simulating any given reality.'

'I beg your pardon!' Lavinia felt peculiarly shocked.

'What that means,' Warden began (infinite patience always available) 'is that a model can be constructed in an IBM 1410 for any particular subject matter – given all the necessary information – and then questions can be fed into it for the rapid computation of new information. Is that clear?'

'No.' Lavinia found safety in another glass of champagne.

'Well, let me give you an example. An information machine of this sort would be able to do something like this——'

'You ah stallin' for time, lammie-doll.' Sir Francis Bacon shafted the horse with a momentarily needle sharp glance. 'If you have all the available information about the amount of——'

'Come dance with me,' Guarcello shouted, grasping Lavinia's arm and dragging her to safety out of the pub. The source of the music was invisible, but the Viennese waltzes had been replaced by grease-smooth fox trots and the motley couples, tightly clasped together as fresh pairs of scissors, were moving saponaceously about in the large square of a foyer. Vincent's nose snuggled into her ear. 'Want to come sleep it off at my place?'

'What price glory?' she asked.

'Make love with me.'

'No thanks.' Her voice was that of a matron rejecting a second tea sandwich at the Palm Court of the Plaza. Maybe she'd have a French pastry later.

'Can't blame me for trying.'

'I don't.'

'You'd be amazed at how often it works.'

'Your equipment?'

'No, I mean the approach.' He laughed. The next song was even slower.

'I don't envy you it . . .'

'I don't get you,' he said. 'You know the way around; you've been married; you're divorced. You've got a good job; you're on the loose. What are you after?'

She let the syrupy music flow over them for a moment, then she answered. 'Something different.'

'From what?'

'From whatever's being offered.'

'There aren't that many alternatives,' he said.

'We'll see.'

Back in her apartment, the sadness began to descend upon her. Googie was awake and helped her out of the costume and she babbled away over two cups of tea about the decor and the food and the view and the guests. But then, after Googie had gone off to the bedroom and she had the living room daybed all made up for herself, Lavinia stood alone in the dark, warm enough in her bathrobe, looking out at empty Sheridan Square, smoking her last cigarette of the first dawn of the New Year.

Can I do it? she asked herself. Can I wake myself up in the middle of my life and say 'Get the hell out of this life; it's a house that's about to burn down.' But where should I go? I gotta change my way of livin' and if that ain't enough . . .

If a woman has courage enough to admit making a bad marriage and fly to Mexico then she can have . . . If I had



nerve enough to change my life once, then I can . . . Oh, what corn. *That* wasn't much of a change. He got the furniture and I got the equivalent of our cash gifts. No alimony and no traces.

There would be enough time to think about it between now and the fourteenth – the next cell meeting. Maybe she would get up and talk; maybe she would have a revelation, a conversion, a metamorphosis by then.

But what could she take seriously? She was twenty-five. She went to a good college. She was bright and she had talent. She could draw, paint, play the piano, cook (a little), she looked pretty and she could be funny. She had been married for two years to a man who had been nice, polite, considerate, even uxorious; so thoroughly considerate, as a matter of fact, that when she asked for a divorce he barely put up a fight at all. 'Well, if that's what you want, darling. I mean if you really believe that's the best thing for *you* . . .'

A nothing. He had about as much character as a towel. A pleasantly-coloured, useful, silent, bathroom towel. She had wiped her hands and dropped him into the hamper. He was beginning as a small corporation lawyer who wanted to end up as a big corporation lawyer. Bourgeois, respectable, upstanding, money-grubbing, dirty-minded athlete. A model man. The very model of a corporation. An anonymous society; participating members – mother and father, uncles and aunts, minister, and school teachers and gym coaches. 'I'll tell them,' she thought. 'The next meeting, I'll have a thing or two to say! If I have the nerve . . .'

At noon the telephone rang and Lavinia groped for the receiver with her eyes closed. 'Hello . . .'

'Hello! Darling! I'

'Oh – Mother.' Lavinia sat bolt upright.

'Happy New Year, *dearest* girl!'

'The same to you, Mother.' She was scanning the room as if to see whether anyone was watching.

'And a *healthy* year; a year that brings you everything your heart desires, sweetheart.'

'The same . . .' Lavinia began. 'Rather, may you have a lot of fun!'

She tried to make her voice smile.

'Oh, Livy,' her mother chided, '“fun” at my age? Come, come; all I can ask for is good health. That's what counts.'

Lavinia wished she could have said, 'What the hell do you want good health for, mommy-darling? You wouldn't have anything to talk about at all if you were perfectly healthy.' But she lit a cigarette instead. She said, 'Please don't call me Livy.'

'How *are* you, darling?' Her mother's tone was heartfelt.

'I'm fine, Mother. How are *you*?'

'Well, I can't complain. My back bothers me as usual; and I don't sleep well. Dr Noble gave me some new pills but they're no better. My legs . . .' She sighed. 'Well, you won't have to think about things like this for a long time, you child. How are *you*, darling? Lonely?'

'I'm fine, Mother. How's Dad?'

'Fine, as ever.'

'And Gramp?'

'Good. Good as can be expected. He's sitting right here across the table from me in the breakfast nook reading the morning paper. He sends you a kiss.'

'Send him one for me.'

'She sends you a kiss, Gramp. Now listen, darling—' she began confidentially. 'When are you coming home for a visit?'

'I just can't say at the moment.' The sensation of cold water began dripping down her spine.

'Darling, you haven't been home . . .' the voice began to whine, 'for *a good long weekend* in I don't know how long.'

'A weekend! - Mother, you know that can't be done. We've been through all that before. You know I can't spare that much time. I simply have too much work. The weekend

is the only time I have for myself – to, to rest up, do my shopping, take care of the apartment . . . And I was with you all Christmas Day.'

'But, dearest! Next weekend we'll be celebrating my birthday. Howard will be down from Colgate.'

'Howard? He was here for ten days between Christmas and New Year's. My God, he isn't even going back until tonight.'

'But,' she was actually being coy now, 'it is *my birthday*. I may not have many more to celebrate with my family.'

'I know it's your birthday, Mother. I've already bought a card for you,' she lied.

'Oh, it isn't the present that counts, believe me, dear. Besides, I'm too old to be getting presents for my birthday. But I'm too old to pretend that I won't miss you if you aren't here to celebrate with me . . . ' Then the next word came out like a whiplash, ' . . . Sunday!'

As a hollow echo, Lavinia repeated the order. 'Sunday.'

'Just the family. We'll have a big dinner. At three. You *will* come, won't you? I mean to the dinner, for the afternoon and evening, that is, *if you really* can't make it for *the whole weekend*.'

'I – I can probably get away for Sunday afternoon.'

'It isn't as though White Plains were ~~a~~ hundred miles away.'

'Of course, Mother.'

'Turkey,' she said. 'Turkey dinner – just like Christmas.'

'About three?'

'You'll make it, won't you?'

'Yes.'

'I'll call you on Thursday to see if you can come for the whole weekend.'

'No, don't bother; I'll call Sunday morning to say what train I can make.'

'Wonderful, Livy; and, darling, do take good care of yourself. Without me to look after you, Lord knows whether you're getting . . . '

'I'll be fine, Mother.'

'Goodbye, dearest. Here's a kiss.' She made a sucking sound that came out as 'puttt'.

'Goodbye, Mother.'

The arc of her cigarette's ashes collapsed all over Lavinia's blanket; she fell back onto the pillows in a state of shock. Behind her head, somehow, she replaced the telephone. She withdrew the hand to her breast: the miner's wife who has just received a call saying there's been an accident in the mine. Her husband might be among those trapped. Her better self. Her real life. Then she toyed with the bitter thought, 'This is going to cost me the price of some idiotic birthday present.' She had hoped to get away with just a card and a phone call. If she remembered the date. But, of course, she would remember the date. That was the trouble. If only she could *not* remember dates, birthdays; anniversaries; holidays. She *always* remembered them. That was the rub. That was the sort of thing she had to get over!

She tried to escape back into sleep.

But couldn't.

She wrapped the top blanket like a toga about her and curled up on the window seat without opening the drapes. Her fingers combed through her honey blonde hair, while she wondered: 'What is it all about? There must be a point. There must be a purpose; some kind of over-all reason that can give meaning to it all. All the time, the effort - the intelligence that has gone into making me up - from the calisthenics in grammar school through reading Kafka at Smith. "A sound mind in a healthy body".' (She flexed the muscles of her right arm under the blanket.) 'Oh, what a bore to be just like everybody else. With everybody else's identical home and education and experiences. Damn it; why does there always have to be a Mother and a Father in the picture? Why are they always the same kind of pain in the neck? Why did it have to be easy? Why was I pretty? Why did I always have fun at summer camps? Why was I good at

school – never brilliant – but nice and good; bright. Why did I have to be popular? Why didn't I ever really have to suffer anything? That's part of what's wrong. There's something missing in my character because I never really suffered.

'Of course, I've made mistakes. But they've been just like everybody else's mistakes. Nothing unique; nothing special. I married the wrong man. There's nothing unusual about that. Even Googie married the wrong man the first time. We all marry the wrong man the first time. But I did it for the right reason. That is, damn it: what everybody made me think was the right reason. I can just hear my mother saying, 'Livy, sweetheart, *don't* have sex *before* you are married. Just don't. Listen to me; believe me; it's for your own good for the *whole* of your life!'

'I was intelligent; I drew the obvious conclusion. Marry as fast as possible. Marry the first man you want to have sex with. That's how you can have it both ways: you can be a virgin on your wedding night and you can start enjoying sex by the time you're twenty. Ah, that's me all over. A healthy mind in a sound body. The absolutely ironclad bourgeois solution. White Plains keeps turning them out; Smith keeps turning them out. At least at Smith my roommate had the decency to say, "Why don't you have an affair with him if you have to; but marry him? What the devil will you talk about in six months? He's a Boy Scout the taxidermists got to early."

'But not Dad; never Dad. He was so proud, so satisfied. A lawyer. A corporation lawyer. All Dad's investments in my summer camps and art lessons – but most of all that investment in Smith – had paid off beautifully. A lawyer – from Harvard. Wow-wee!'

She looked about the room in the half-light of midday filtered through the purple burlap drapes. Two walls were navy and two were fuchsia. There were oriental cushions on either side of the white brick fireplace. There was no table lamp; only spotlights blossoming from an iron tree, and the

ceiling light covered by a white paper Japanese lantern. Two black leather saddle chairs faced each other opposite the coffee table (made out of a kettle drum). There was a collection of paperback books on the four sides of an old-fashioned, square, revolving bookcase (painted white); a bowl full of Italian glass fruits on the table (made of a door laid across black iron horses); and on the walls – prints of Redon, Pollack, Kline, and one lovely large blue period Picasso (for nostalgic effect). ‘Just exactly like everybody else’s apartment,’ she thought. ‘Everyone I know *now*, that is. The bourgeoisie on the outer rims: whether on the way to be incasts or on the way to be outcasts. The rim-bourgeoisie. The fence-sitters; holding down respectable but low-paying jobs during the day, drinking espresso and trying to think about Existence at night. From either fence they can fall either way – into Westchester or into the Bowery; into Westchester or into Park Avenue. Only one thing becomes absolutely certain; they must fall one way or another. It is inconceivable that anyone should die in a room like this. That’s what’s meant by saying that Bohemia is dead.’

‘Why do I keep thinking “they”?’ she wondered. ‘Aren’t I one of them? If I’m not – I’d better start thinking of myself floating through space.’

‘How romantic-looking!’ Googie said. ‘I’ve been standing in the doorway for five minutes. At first I thought you were a ghost. Then the whole picture changed. There you were – the young girl just back from the ball, unable to sleep all night, watching the dawn rise and thinking of the beautiful men you’d danced with at the party . . . How about some coffee?’

It was a lazy day. There was a party in the apartment of their next-door neighbours; but they hardly knew any of the people and disliked all of them; they each drank an eggnog and said they had to meet friends arriving at Grand Central. They walked around in deserted Washington Square and

watched the fat old Italians, bundled up against the cold, playing chess on the concrete tables. In the evening they drank espresso in a tiny café, and talked about Existence. Googie had read Buber at Hunter; Lavinia had read Sartre at Smith. They stopped only when Googie suddenly remembered, 'We ought to get back and straighten up the apartment. The maid is coming tomorrow.' That gave Lavinia the first good laugh she'd had all day. Then they went home and straightened up the apartment.

## Chapter Three

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GETTING back to the office was more of a pleasure than Lavinia had anticipated. The truth of the matter was that she liked her work. On the second day of the new year the staff of *Fashion* was completely concerned with the June first issue which, it had already been decided, would be organized about the principal problem 'What to wear during the Fourth of July Weekend.' The scheme was to instigate masqued balls at beach clubs and country clubs – terribly unusual; there's almost never a masquerade in the summer. The art department was to plan sketches for parties on the following themes: The Unaware Aristocrats; The Convention at the Tennis Court; The Lean and Hungry Jacobins; and the Napoleons Wait in the Wings. The late-summer fashions would be grouped about these imaginary galas.

The art director, Lavinia, the managing editor, and the production manager sat in a semi-circle before Mrs Wheelwright and her secretary. 'That's all, then,' Betty Wheelwright proclaimed in her whisper, and the group was about to disperse when Vincent Guarcello pointed out that the themes were more appropriate to the Fourteenth of July and an edition of *Paris-Vogue* than to the Fourth of July – 'or isn't this supposed to have anything to do with the *American* Revolution?' There was a moment of pained



silence. 'Testing. Just testing.' Betty Wheelwright finally grated out in the tone of pure boredom, 'You get a gold star, Vincent. I'm glad to see that someone stays awake at these meetings. Now to be serious about my plans—' The members of the staff dropped back into their seats. 'Have the sketches grouped about the following themes:—' Silence again.

Mrs Wheelwright's secretary (a sweet boy of about forty, with a large pink mouth and a bright bald head) suggested: 'Hadrn't you mentioned to me "A Tea Party in Boston", "Thomas Jefferson and the Slave Girl", "An Aaron Burr - Alexander Hamilton trip up the Hudson", and "The French Influence on Styles at the Constitutional Convention"—?'

Mrs Wheelwright seemed to pat the air several times just above her secretary's hand. 'Right you are, you blessing you.' His bald pate blushed; he withdrew his hand from the desk top. 'I must have left my notes in your office. You've all got that straight, haven't you? Off you go now, the rest of you. To the barricades! There'll be another meeting here at this time next Monday morning. Out you go, now, I have to see the editorial people at ten-thirty. Out. Out!' She waved her padded arm with a naked index finger stabbing the air; 'Out!'

'*Vive la République!*' Guarcello snarled as the large door snapped shut behind them.

There was a conference with the art director about free lance assignments, and then Lavinia was back in her own office - a metal and glass cube with the layout of the pages of *Fashion* pinned along one cork wall, a drawing-board, a formica-topped table covered with paints, watercolours, origami paper, brushes, a telephone, a typewriter, and a wastebasket. She breathed a sigh of contentment. She knew exactly what to do and she enjoyed discovering how to bring it about. She worked steadily for an hour. Then the

mail boy brought the incoming things, mostly interoffice memos. A blond curly-haired kid of nineteen or so. He limped in and waited while she began to untie the large envelopes.

'I suppose you want to know what happened to my foot,' he said. She nodded gently. 'Dropped a carton of paper clips on it. And that's no joke. Felt like a ton of bricks. Enough paper clips for a year, you know.' He was actually pouting.

'Why don't you go to a doctor?' Lavinia said.

'You think I won't?' He limped out of the office, mad.

'The world consists of two hundred million incurable paranoid schizophrenics,' Lavinia announced to herself.

One of the memos was from Arthur Warden asking her to phone him. She dialed the number.

'*Thought!*'

'May I speak with Mr Warden, please?'

'Are you on the inside?'

'Of some things; but not much.'

'Mr Warden's line is busy. Will you wait?'

'No, thank you.'

'This is Mr Warden's secretary. May I ask who is calling?'

'Just say, "Lavinia Mermaid".'

'Thank you.'

'Thank *you*.'

Lavinia found herself humming softly. When the phone rang she said, 'Underwater!'

'I must have the wrong department.' It was not Arthur Warden's voice.

'Just a moment! I was kidding.'

'What is this - *Skin Diving* magazine?'

'*Fashion* art department.' Lavinia felt chastened.

'I'm trying to locate a beautiful woman named Lavinia.'

Silence. Then, 'This is her secretary. May I ask who is calling?'

'Mr Bowen. Jeffrey Bowen.'

'One moment, please.' She cleared her throat and softly said, 'Hello.'

'I don't know if you'll remember me. We met the other night at the Wheelwrights'. I was wearing a space suit.'

'Oh - Mr *Bones*! Someone told me your name was *Bones*. How did you find me?'

'That must have been Mrs Warden. She has difficulty speaking the language. Find you? Well, I - followed the scent of your perfume.'

Silence. Then, quickly, 'I'm up here at *Thought*; just finished correcting proof.'

'In Warden's office?'

'Next door.'

'Did you ask him to have me call?'

'No. I'm a big boy now; I'm doing this all on my own.'

Silence. 'I wonder if you'll have lunch with me?'

Lavinia looked at her wristwatch; twenty of one. 'Now?'

'Great! I didn't know whether you'd be free today. But that's fine, fine!'

'I haven't said "Yes" yet.'

'Oh.'

'I'm saying "Yes" now.'

'Great! Fine! I'll meet you in the lobby. OK!'

'Give me twenty minutes.'

'Perfect. See you then.'

'Wait a minute. What do you look like today?'

'Normal. Business suit. Very upstanding. Very middle class. Anyhow, I'll recognize you. Until then!'

'Bye.'

The phrase 'middle class' took all of the pleasure out of it for Lavinia. She looked out of the window at a patch of winter sky and drew a deep sigh, thinking, 'That tears it. But then . . . what if he were still wearing the space suit?'

The first thing he said to her was, 'I felt sure I would recognize you without a mask on.' Lavinia did a momentary

double take – thinking first of the eye-slits in the hood at the B.A. meeting. ‘It’s your lips I remembered perfectly; and your hair.’ They were shaking hands. He looked taller and thinner in a business suit; there was something lithe about him. More like a swimmer than like a baseball player. But intense. He spoke quickly and with confidence. All in a glance, Lavinia took in the grey tweed Ivy League suit, the rep tie, the white button-down shirt. It was all too familiar. But for the face. It was neither Hollywood nor Harvard-Yale-Princeton. It was more Method Acting. She would have to study the face.

‘Where would you like to go? Someplace nearby? Chauveron? Chambord? Howard Johnson? How much time do you have?’

‘I ought to be back in an hour or so. Anywhere nearby.’ They were standing on the corner of Madison and 57th Street. He walked her over to the Laurent: very French food in an English-looking room, large and quiet, with the tables far apart, panelled walls, with rich colours in the rug and cushions, and handsome paintings on the walls. ‘One could be happy here,’ he said, after they’d ordered drinks. She was surprised by how reticent she was being with him. When the cocktails arrived he offered a toast: ‘To the new year and new acquaintances.’ She thought of her mother, while they held their glasses up – ‘Health. That’s what’s important. Just good health.’

‘Why are you being so silent?’ he asked.

‘I was frightened by a garrulous mother in early childhood.’

He looked at her without expression and then asked, ‘Are you in analysis?’

She laughed. ‘You mean *Manhattan Transfer*?’

‘That’s not a bad line.’

‘No, I’ve never been . . .’ Then she didn’t seem to know how she meant to end that statement.

‘Well now. How do we get to know each other?’

'It's not like a problem in mathematics, is it?' she asked. She thought that was a nice touch: a way of showing him that she remembered what he had told her about himself. He seemed to take it for granted. 'As a matter of fact, the real problem is "How do we get to know ourselves?" isn't it.'

'Maybe you should be in analysis.'

'Why do you keep harping on *that*?' She showed him her well-manicured fingertips. 'I don't bite my nails.'

'I do.'

'Are you in analysis?'

'I'm glad you asked that.'

'You mean "Yes"?''

'Yes.'

'Whatever for? You look perfectly normal to me?'

'It's a disguise. The truth is I'm not perfectly normal. I'm too much of an odd ball. Always have been. All my life. That's why I'm in analysis. What I *want* is to be perfectly normal.'

Lavinia laughed out loud. 'That's marvellous!' She couldn't resist patting his arm affectionately. She sipped at her drink, shook her head, and continued to laugh softly.

'What's the joke?'

'I *am* perfectly normal!' she explained. 'And what I *want* is to be an odd ball.'

'Let me recommend the Boeuf Talleyrand,' he said as Max stood by to take the order. Then he asked for a bottle of Romanée-Conti's La Tache, 1955, without looking at the wine list.

'Just how odd would you like to be?' he asked.

'Well, let's say odd enough to be either an outcast or an incast; anything as long as it's not just another bourgeois.'

'Incast?'

'I'll explain it to you someday.'

'But you look so successfully bourgeois!' he said admiringly.

That wiped the smile from her lips. 'You've just put your finger on the whole trouble. I'm much *too* well adjusted. I'm completely at home in my straitjacket.' She sipped the wine. 'But I want to leave home.'

'I need to find a home. I'm completely un-adjusted.'

'You're not exactly breathing fire. Nobody has to clean the egg off your chin. You shaved today. What makes you say you're such an odd one?'

'The way I feel; and the way I've lived all my life.'

With her elbow on the table, Lavinia rested her head against her hand. 'Tell me the story of your life.'

'I was born in 1932, in the worst of the depression. Not far from here; where the U.N. is now. It was all tenements in those days – around the wholesale meat markets. My parents were living together but they weren't married. My father was supposed to have been a brilliant man – handsome, charming, the son of a wealthy family. He'd run away from home. He was an actor – out of work at the time they were living together. As soon as I was born he abandoned my mother. She's never heard from him since. She had to support the two of us, always on odd jobs. She worked like a slave. And so did I, from the time that I was seven.'

Lavinia said, 'Eat some of the roast beef before it gets cold,' and then felt the slight chill that came with recognizing her mother's voice speaking through her.

'Well, when I wasn't working I was alone a lot of the time. I read a great deal. I went through all of the material of high school by the time I was thirteen, so I quit. The war was still on, so I had an easy time taking courses at Columbia, City College, and N.Y.U. without being registered. There was practically no one in the classes. I was mainly interested in mathematics. I used to pretend at City that I was enrolled at Columbia, but going out of my way for a special course (and vice versa). I couldn't have afforded to pay for the classes. It worked out perfectly. The professors were flattered and they liked my work. They didn't care whether

I was matriculated or not. I took all of the courses I wanted and never paid a cent. And then there weren't any courses left that I needed.

'I didn't have the kind of record that would have let me apply for a Fulbright or a Ford, so I worked my way around the world on freighters (I was a radio operator) and ended up in Europe when I was nineteen and stayed for six years. I could always get odd jobs; and I was accustomed to living on a shoe string. And I studied. I lived first in France, then England, then Spain. Once I took a year off and walked around Italy. That's a wonderful way to get to know . . . I'm not boring you, am I?'

'If my eyes look glazed,' she said, 'it's awe, not sleepiness.'

'You meant it when you asked me to tell you about myself?'

'Of course. Go on!'

'There's not much more of this obituary column stuff to tell. By the time I came back to the States, I started earning a lot of dough as a consultant. Computers. You know that's what I'm doing an article about for Warden, don't you? My time's my own. I work when I feel like it. I take off when I feel like it. Last month my analyst took a short vacation, so I went skiing at Davos. Do you ski?'

'You mean: you're rich now?'

'Mildly rich. Now my mother lives off me, but she won't live with me; and I go to the analyst.'

'But your life sounds ideal to me. You sound like something of a genius; you've got recognition; you've got money; and you make your own rules. What more do you want?'

'I want to be like everybody else.'

'What in God's name for?'

'Well, what do you think explains all the striving, all the effort, all the work—? I mean: what do you think the *motivation* was?'

'Beats me.'

'Perfectly clear to me: it's so I could pull myself up out of the working class into the middle class. So I could have all of the things and be all of the things that I've been told are what make life worth living. You know – a good home, a nice family, kids, a regular life, steady friends. All that!'

'Well, then why don't you just do it: buy it. All it takes is money. What's keeping you from having it? Why go to an analyst?'

'Ah – you're wrong there. I *think* about what I should do to be like everybody else; but I don't have any talent for it. I don't really believe in it. I have to work at it. Getting adjusted, I mean. You see: I didn't grow up with it. I have to learn it. The analyst is trying to help me understand my feelings well enough so that I can overcome being so independent, and always having my own way. He's trying to help me learn to live a more inhibited life. He's teaching me middle class values.'

Lavinia, slightly open-mouthed with disbelief, stared at him, speechless.

'As a matter of fact,' he went on, 'my analyst went with me to pick out this suit. I'd been having my clothes tailor-made in Spain; but he showed me why I had to get my suits at Brooks Brothers, like everybody else. The custom-made stuff was too way out. Unique to me. You see?'

Lavinia pursed her lips. 'Tell me – how long does the analyst think it will take to transform you?'

'He can't answer that. Maybe a few more months, maybe years. I seem to be developing some full-blown bourgeois neuroses and then – *puff!* – I'm off being my old comfortable self. There's a lot of backsliding that way. But he's hopeful. He thinks I will make a really first class bourgeois someday if I stick to it. But . . . it's the way I spend money that bothers him most. I never buy anything I can't pay cash for; and I never worry about having more. You see, I don't *need* very much, and then I always know I can make lots more.' He paused, and then he sounded somewhat sad.



'It's the transference that's the hardest part, though. That's because of my father – not having one, I mean. My analyst thinks I ought to find my father, so I can rebel against him; otherwise, I can't ever fully come around to accepting him. I have a detective working on it now. "Roland Bowen" was his name. That's all I have to go on. I hope he turns out to be a well-established middle-class daddy so I can hate him for a while. Otherwise, I may just go along never feeling any resentment, and you know how that would disqualify me from the bourgeoisie.'

They finished the wine. Lavinia shook her head and repeated, 'I don't believe it: I just can't let myself believe it.'

'What?'

'That anyone can talk like this.'

'What do you mean? Have I embarrassed you?'

'You've amazed me.'

'Well, you're the one who said something about our having to know ourselves in order to get to know each other.'

'But why have you told *me* all this?'

'I want to get to know you! I want to have a love affair with you!'

Mother, Father, White Plains, Smith College, all rallied around Lavinia, to defend and preserve her. The shock went through her history like a current that would have raised the dead. '*That* is a pretty cheeky thing to say!'

'Why not?' he asked. 'What have I got to lose? I certainly meant it. I'm being honest. What else should I pretend I'm interested in? I don't know anything about you!'

'Well, one thing you've got to lose is the chance of finding out anything more about me.'

'But if you're not attracted to me in the same way, why should I want to know anything else about you?'

He had her there. All she could say was, 'You're certainly not being very middle class about your approach.'

He was crestfallen. 'Damn it, I should have known

better. Wait till I tell this to my analyst. I should have been indirect. Of course, of course, I should have been subtle; cagey; sly. I should have winked and asked if you'd like to go ice skating, bowling, dancing; I should never have been *honest*. After all, what attracts me in you is how pure-bred middle class you seem to be.'

'I resent that!'

'I admire it! And I'm sorry I goofed. I apologize.'

They sat quietly, avoiding each other's glance, while coffee was served.

Gradually, Lavinia began to appear transfigured. As soon as the memory of the cell meeting came to mind she was all smiles. 'I can't imagine why I was offended,' she began. 'I love your approach. Thank God, you're not bourgeois. All right – the truth is: I am attracted to you . . . in that way.' She was stirring her coffee. 'You'll come and have dinner at my place, won't you? Say, tomorrow night?'

Jeffrey Bowen, beaming a great smile, slapped his hands together so hard that everyone in the restaurant turned to stare. Lavinia focussed intently on her coffee as she felt the blush flood through her cheeks.

## Chapter Four

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'DID I tell you what happened yesterday?' Lavinia asked.

'You certainly told me about Mr Bones. Or are we setting this table as a practical joke on me?' Googie was re-cleaning the already dried wine glasses. Lavinia laid the silverware.

'No,' she said dreamily. 'I mean about B. A.'

'I don't remember.'

'Arthur Warden called me in the afternoon. As a matter of fact, he tried reaching me in the morning.'

'Is that a bad sign?'

'He asked me how *he* could find out more about Bourgeois Anonymous.'

'More? What does he know now?'

'Only that I mentioned it to him at the Wheelwrights' party New Year's Eve.'

'Oh, yes. What did you tell him to do?'

'I just said to telephone "Despair"; and he laughed.'

'Do you think he'll follow it up?'

'Lord knows he needs it.'

'Wouldn't it be fun to hear him get up and unburden his soul at one of the cell meetings. The editor of *Thought* finally caught in the presence of a personal idea.'

'Somehow I can't imagine that he will. He's so completely self-satisfied.'

'Nobody is completely self-satisfied. They just re-gild their frames of reference more often. That's my word of wisdom for the day.'

The table was ready. There were purple straw mats at each of the three places. The wine was open and 'breathing'. There was a presto-log fire going in the fireplace and candles grouped around the table centre. On the hi-fi a stack of Brahms' *Leider* tilted ready for action. Lavinia wore a lavender skirt and sweater. Googie had on a knitted dress that looked like jagged flashes of lightning across a blue-black sky. She fluffed up the pillows on the studio couch. Lavinia checked on the artichokes.

'We should have bought flowers.'

'Googie,' Lavinia began, 'this is an experiment, not a Venus fly trap. Here we have a chance to sit down with a natural horn incast who doesn't even know it, to find out what makes him tick, and try to persuade him not to become a bourgeois. We shouldn't muff it by confusing the issues.'

'A little romance never confused anything. A little beauty. A little charm. What other techniques do you have?'

'I just want us to talk with him - straight from the shoulder.'

'That's a mixed metaphor,' Googie said, looking at her shoulder.

'His values are all wrong. He's hung up on this problem of an unsolved relationship. He's locking backward instead of forward. Now, if we can straighten him out, show him how well off he is, and find out how he got that way, we might be that much ahead in our effort to get over being bourgeois ourselves.'

'But he was never bourgeois to begin with.'

'That's the beauty of it. He went from being an outcast to being an incast. That simplified the whole thing. But he did it unself-consciously. If only we can put our fingers on *how* it's done!'

'From what you've told me - I've got all ten fingers on it

already. He's a genius. So there's no secret about it. It's just what The Teacher has always said: the genius can't help us. He just wasn't middle class to begin with and never had the problem of getting over it. It's us poor slob, caught in the middle, who need the pity and the help.'

'Well, let me try to handle this my way, will you?'

'Of course. Go ahead. Try. Try.' Googie had fallen back on the studio couch and depressed all the pastel coloured pillows. She was back on her feet in an instant to begin fluffing and re-arranging each of them again.

Jeffrey Bowen stood in the doorway watching the scene; one arm behind his back.

Startled, Googie asked, 'Who are you?'

'I was invited.'

'Oh, are you Mr Bones?'

Lavinia said, 'The door must have been open.'

'No, but I have a great skeleton key,' he said, with a boyish smile.

'This is my roommate, Googie.'

They both said, 'How do you do?' politely, in chorus. Then Jeffrey brought out from behind his back a large bunch of yellow roses wrapped in florist's green paper, and presented them to Lavinia. 'It's a custom I didn't master in Germany. The trick is to remove the paper while it's still in back of you, but I never found out what you were supposed to do with the paper then.'

'They're lovely. Thank you!' Lavinia clutched them to her like a pianist during the ovation for a concert. 'I'll put them right in water.'

'A touch of charm,' Googie said, 'A little beauty. A little romance. Flowers - I mean. Won't you sit down?' She switched on the phonograph. 'Thank you.' He slouched comfortably into one of the metal frame chairs near the fireplace.

'What would you like to drink?' Lavinia called from the sink.

'Scotch.'

'Coming up.'

'That was such a pretty scene,' Bowen began, 'as I entered – you fluffing up the pillows in the firelight . . .'

Googie said, 'Haven't you ever turned that skeleton key in the wrong door? Or the right door at the wrong time?'

'Definitely!' he started with enthusiasm, but before he could continue, Lavinia had placed a highball in his hand and set the roses down in a vase near the fire. The fire colours of egg yolk and scarlet shot up through the glass bowl, and supported the blossoms on gilded green stalks. 'Beautiful!' he exclaimed. 'Beautiful.'

Lavinia made a mental note to discuss later with Googie his powers of concentration. Thinking: did you see that, Googie, the way he immediately responded to a sensual stimulus? Gave himself over to it immediately and wholeheartedly. I like that. Shows intensity. What she said was, 'They're darling. Thank you so much. How do you like the drink? Need more of anything?'

'No. No; no thank you. It's fine.'

'You must tell us about what you do!' Googie demanded. 'I'm a mathematician.'

Lavinia said, 'That's like telling us you're a scientist. What one wants to know is: what activities do you actually perform?'

'I calculate.'

They sipped on their drinks for a moment.

'We all calculate . . .' Googie said coyly.

'But I get paid for it.'

'*What* do you calculate?' Googie smiled persistently.

'Probability, mostly.'

'What do you work with?' she continued. Her gesture was that of trying to remove imaginary Scotch tape pasted to both hands. 'You know what I mean – what's the stuff?'

'Physically? – I work with magnetic tape and punch cards; I use all sorts of computers.'

'But how? What for?' Lavinia asked gently.

'Well - I might be asked to work out the probability problems involved in rocket machinery; or the best means for transforming a factory into an automated assembly line; or calculate certain demographic shifts for the Institute of Statistics. I did a project of that sort about five months ago. Do you know that the population of California is going to be double that of the state of New York by the spring of 1981?'

'How would I know?' Googie asked.

'No. Of course,' he said. 'I forgot that hasn't been made public yet.'

'Why should a mathematician be involved in this sort of thing?' Lavinia asked.

'Somebody has to figure out how to feed information into a computer: that's the input. Then - how to get the output wanted: then what kind of storage of the information is wanted for future calculations and plot that. It's basically; input, process, output, storage. And then, naturally, it helps to have someone know how to interpret the results.' He smiled with satisfaction.

'What was it Mr Warden said to me about your being able to simulate any given reality . . .?'

'*Given* is the key word. If investigators are able to gather together enough data about a particular subject matter - for example, voting habits in the United States, and then the interests and prejudices of the electorate - and if you could project a profile of a total synthetic voting population (simulated in the computer, that is), then you could break it down by geographical or economic or religious or social groups and you would be able to test political problems in advance. So a man running for the Presidency could find out what policy position would be most persuasive for a given group. And he can make his shifts in campaign speeches accordingly.'

'That sounds like cheating,' Googie said.

'Be prepared,' he laughed. 'It's coming. Candidates can treat themselves like any other commodity. And they will, if they can get away with it. It's like any other kind of consumer research: as long as people are willing to answer private questions as part of public information polls – they're selling themselves short. I don't get involved with that sort of research very often myself, though. But I use it for my hobby; I'm collecting all sorts of data on different class behaviour patterns. Most of the time I'm involved with planning peaceful uses for atomic energy; irrigation of drought land; improvements in communications: like the two-way television-telephone; synthetic foods – things of that sort.'

'Food!' Lavinia gasped; both Googie and she jumped up to see what was happening at the stove.

Within five hectic minutes they were all seated at the dining table before the artichokes; and the conversation was mostly about artichokes until the curry was served.

Lavinia built a nest of rice around the centre of each plate and Googie feathered it with chicken curry. They handed the chutney back and forth within the triangle.

Finally, Lavinia said, 'You really believe in the future, don't you? What you've been telling us about involves projects that pull you into things that will happen a decade from now, and you know that those developments will lure you on to be concerned with things that won't matter to anyone else until a generation from now . . . on and on. You really don't belong to the present at all; you're part of the future. You even talk about it as though the future is vastly more interesting than the present. You simply inhabit the future; you don't even live in the present at all!'

'I'm enjoying this curry – presently.'

'I don't mean such things of the senses. I mean in your mental life, in the spirit, you're not "with us" in any ordinary sense. You're ahead of us. Your real existence is placed in a different time, just as surely as a believing



Christian might know that he is living his true life in a Roman catacomb in the first century A.D., even though he's crossing the street downstairs, here, at this very moment. It's a matter of values, of course, not of time or place. It all depends on what your frame of reference is *made of*, doesn't it?

'Well, I don't mind your putting it that way; it sounds very poetic.' Still he said this with a certain reserve.

'But, then, if that's the case,' Lavinia brought down her guillotine question, 'how in heaven's name can you *want* to be *bourgeois*? How can you? It's perfectly anachronistic!'

'We're all monsters of anachronism,' he answered blandly. 'Everything exists simultaneously. Let's suppose there's a man crossing the street downstairs, who, in his soul, is a first century Christian martyr. By the same token, at the same street corner, there may be a Neanderthal cave man, a Chinese mandarin, a Spanish baroque grandee, and a whore from a Babylonian temple. And they are all moving toward the drug store to buy packages of the same cigarettes!'

Googie said, 'Delightful!'

He continued, 'No one supposes that in this day and age there is harmony or even congruence between one's mental life and his social behaviour. I might be involved with the future in my "spirit", as you put it, but that doesn't give me leave to *act* as though this is 1997, does it?'

'Why not?' Lavinia said.

'No one knows how anyone will act in 1997.'

'But if you're a man-of-the-future, just *be yourself*!'

'I haven't *been* anybody else. Besides, isn't it enough to create patterns for reality simulations in a computer? – do I have to invent a style of life for myself, too? I'm just trying to adapt to an existing model of behaviour so that I can get along better in the present. The future will take care of itself.'

Lavinia blurted out: 'But what the hell is so fascinating about the middle class style of life?'

*'The power of the imagination!'* he answered. *'It's staggering.'*

Silence; then Googie said, 'I can't imagine what you're talking about.'

'You two gracious, sweet, lovely, and charming ladies have both just shown respect – downright reverence – for my work, because it makes me concerned with the future, with imaginative leaps in the dark, with hypotheses, suppositions, guesses, trials and errors, all on the level of experimenting with the not-yet-existing. But you don't have any respect whatsoever for (not even awareness of) the fact that my fascination with the middle class arises from realizing that I see exactly the same features there.'

'Where?'

'In order to be middle class, you have to exhibit the imagination of a da Vinci, a Galileo, an Einstein.'

There was a chorus of disbelieving gasps from the ladies.

'Let me put it to you this way. What are the distinguishing characteristics of the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat? Both the aristocrat and the prol can be completely selfish, completely egocentric, and completely depraved. The one because he has so much power, economically or socially or personally, that no authority can touch him; the other because he has nothing to lose; if he isn't completely concerned with himself no one will give a damn about him. But look at the difference there is in the middle class. To be a good bourgeois – you have to *care* about *others*, you have to consider their feelings, respect their ideas, cater to their comforts. You have to be trying forever to anticipate the attitudes of someone else; ready to compromise with them; eager to accommodate to them; happy to sympathize with them; prepared to participate with them. What a gigantic effort of the imagination! It would be difficult enough if the bourgeois were articulate and could express ideas and communicate feelings accurately. But in fact they aren't; and to make matters worse the whole enterprise is complicated by exquisite formality.

'You mustn't speak the truth. Nothing is to be stated spontaneously or directly. There is as much formality as at Louis XIV's Versailles. But worse: the forms keep changing. Everything has to be guessed at. If I say, "Do you mind if I do such and such?" and you answer, "No, I don't mind at all," I have to listen through the words to the tone, to the inflection, to the breathing – God knows what all the signs are – in order to find out what you really mean. I have to become a human radar set. I have to be tuned in to every variation in your sending system to make sure that I don't offend you or the rules; to be certain not to hurt you. So that you won't hurt me. The whole game has to do with giving up my right to direct satisfaction and accepting the condition of sublimation for all desires, so that they can be achieved as a group effort. Even if the group consists of only two people. Still, no matter how large or small the group, the rules of the game prohibit individual, solitary, isolated, direct gratification. That's what characterizes the aristocrat or the proletariat. And they're equally disqualified from the bourgeoisie; they don't have the imagination. They're in too much of a hurry. That's why they always end up alone. They're loners. To be middle class, on the other hand, is to be part of something greater than yourself: a couple, a family, an organization. . . . Don't you see how glorious an idea this is? How demanding? How exalted? How saintly? To be bourgeois,' he concluded, 'is to live, day in and day out, in every human relation, in the realm of perpetual creative imagination! – It's sublime!'

Googie said, 'Are you kidding?'

He smiled. 'You ask a silly question, you get . . .'

'Dessert,' Lavinia announced. She cleared the table and brought out the marron glacé.

'Mr Bowen,' Lavinia began. 'I'd say you've been victimized by your own idealism, your good will, and your lack of direct experience of bourgeois life.'

'That may be. I know that you are eager to be relieved of the burden, the strain that being middle class places on you. But perhaps that's because your imagination is not equal to the effort that it demands. Sorry if I sound offensive. No offence meant. As you see, I'm not quite equal to it myself. I haven't taken the plunge, yet.'

'I've been in it all my life. And I know that you're simply deluding yourself with an idealized vision.'

'"Idealization" simply means the idea of something at its best.'

'But being bourgeois is not an idea; it's a way of life.'

'Is it never at its best?'

No answer.

'Or have you been so unlucky as to see it only at its worst?'

'At least, I do know it at its worst. And that's exactly the opposite of what you've described. Sure, you're *supposed* to consider other people's ideas and feelings. Sure, you're *supposed* to care, sympathize, and all that. . . . But what happens? Ninety-nine and forty-four one-hundredths per cent of the bourgeoisie has absolutely no radar, no response mechanism, no imagination at all! The rules become the ends in themselves. You're *supposed* to *want* to congratulate your mother on her birthday. But, whether or not you want to, you *have* to. How do you do it? What feelings or thoughts do you express? You don't have any. So you go to a store and buy a printed card with a mass-produced "greeting" on it. Something "personalized" like "To My Own Sweet Mother On Her One Hundred and Twelfth Birthday." Pure formality,' Lavinia continued. 'All form and no content. All shapes and no matter. All little cut-out, cookie-mould, threadbare rules with no hearts, no lungs, no groins. Empty, hollow, petrified, dead, dead. Dead!'

No one spoke.

Lavinia calmed down. 'Have some coffee,' she said. She

smiled to herself. 'I'd really like you both to have some coffee. I make very good coffee. Googie will attest to that.'

They took the cups with them to the chairs grouped about the fireplace, and sat there without saying a word for more than two minutes. Googie announced: 'It's a sign of great psychological sympathy and harmony to be able to share silence. I mean: if you really communicate through silence, then you're communicating at the highest level. At least that's what The Teacher says. I understand he's studied Zen.'

The silence was, therefore, compulsory for another three minutes. Finally, Bowen asked, 'What teacher?'

Lavinia and Googie nodded at each other; it was The Moment. 'When I told you that I'm trying to overcome being bourgeois,' Lavinia said, 'I didn't mean it was just "a problem" for me; I meant I'm really working at it. I've finally joined an organization that can help me. Googie's been a member for some time now. It's called Bourgeois Anonymous. And "The Teacher" is the title for the leader of each cell.'

'Bourgeois Anonymous!' Bowen laughed. '—like Alcoholics Anonymous?'

'Yes!' Googie's voice was sharp. 'What's so funny about that?'

'I think it's a riot.'

Lavinia's voice was sugar-coated with consideration: 'Why?'

'Well, what I'm looking for is the sister organization. A group that will help show me how to be successfully bourgeois. You see — there are places you can go to learn how to swim, and groups you can join to teach you how to dance, or play golf, or participate in politics, or make you a Big Brother, or take birth control to the natives of Tanganyika; and now I find out that there's even a group to help you *overcome* being bourgeois. But where the hell is

the organization to teach you how to be a good bourgeois to begin with?

Lavinia said, 'Organization? Why, that's what Western civilization is all about. Just be a drone, a cog in the wheel, an ant carrying your share of the dung to the ant hill; everything from Sunday School versions of the Bible to full page ads in *Life* magazine; all the Hollywood movies and all the Fireside Chats and all the do-good, play-it-safe sermons on television and in all the novels – that's what they're *all* about! Don't ask any questions; believe what the bosses tell you; keep your kids clean and quiet and sexless and dull; stay out of jail; and spend your whole life being "healthy" and "keeping busy".'

She actually laughed at the sound of the last phrase. It was her mother's version of the good life: 'keeping busy'. As though the real danger, the real threat in this difficult span of time from birth to 'the great return' was to be thrown on her own resources without anything to 'keep busy' about. The gaping void, the real abyss of existence would be having *nothing to do*. Actually, there was no imminent danger; '*they*' were always coming up with something new to keep you busy about. Mahjong, bridge, or canasta; then there was knitting; then *they* were all re-decorating; then there was plastic; then *they* started travelling – first cruises in the Caribbean, then a trip to see the rest of America; then Europe.

Lavinia concluded: 'The essence of being bourgeois is to live your life in such a way that someday – on some unimaginable, distant, heavenly day – you can finally earn enough money to live within your means, and still live as well as *they* do.' She laughed again.

'Why does it make you so bitter?' Bowen asked.

'I'm not bitter.'

'You certainly are. You take it all so seriously. But what's wrong? Don't you want a good home? nice kids? trips abroad? a swimming pool? . . .'

Googie said, 'I don't understand your line of thought.'

'I mean: why does it bother you so much? If you hate it as much as you seem to, why not just chuck it, and go your own way?'

After a pause, Googie said, 'The problem is to *find* your own way – considering how everything in our society pressures you into following everybody else's way.'

Lavinia said, 'All right; I am bitter.'

'Why?'

'For two reasons. First, the whole thing is a sham. It's never what it appears to be, which means that no one who's bourgeois is happy. And second, it's so seductively easy. The whole system of our culture – our society, our civilization – the whole shebang is directed toward making it always easier to sell out, easier to do what's shoddy or shabby or second rate. Always easier than being yourself or doing what's first class.'

'What makes you think,' Bowen asked, 'that first class ought to be easy?' He waved a hand in the air, as if brushing off flies. 'Besides, I don't believe that is what makes you so bitter. It's because you really admire it at bottom. At heart, in the blood, in the bone – wherever it counts – you really like it. You respect it. You're just disappointed that the bourgeoisie isn't as *good* as you want it to be. Haven't you ever known a renegade Catholic? Any lapsed believer, for example? They're always the harshest critics of the believers, of the Church, of the "whole system" of religion. If they didn't really care about the Church, do you think they'd go on beating the dead horse? Of course not. It's because they really love it, at heart. They're just disappointed and bitter because it isn't good *enough* for them – it isn't as good as it would be if they were running it!'

Lavinia poured hot coffee.

Bowen continued: 'Most people are primarily masochists. They love fondling their own wounds. . . .'

Lavinia interrupted. 'How about yourself? What's psychoanalysis but a scheduled time and place for you to finger your own wounds in front of an audience?'

'Well, that's one of the few things I share with most people. But the idea is to become so goddamned familiar with your own wounds that you can forget about them and go on from there. Isn't that what you hope Bourgeois Anonymous will do for you?'

'Yes.'

'Well, what I still don't get is: why do you feel so wounded by it? What did being bourgeois do to you that was so awful?'

'It protected me; it sheltered me; it gave me a false sense of security; it gave me a set of values that's as phony as a three dollar bill.'

'You mean it tried to make you happy in a world of unhappiness. What's wrong with that?'

'It didn't prepare me for real life.'

Jeffrey Bowen sighed. 'You mean - real life is how the proletariat live?'

'Yes.'

Googie amended it to: 'The proletariat and the aristocracy. The outcasts and the incasts.'

Jeffrey Bowen shook his head disbelievingly. 'You're unsatisfied because you were brought up as a middle class kid, not as a worker's brat; and I'm dissatisfied because I was brought up as a working class kid and not a spoiled brat in some nice conventional bourgeois family. I guess the rule is just that being satisfied with what you get is as *unlikely* as a blond Chinese.'

Lavinia thought about it for a moment and realized that there are no blond Chinese. She smiled. 'Jeffrey,' she began, and then she added caressingly, 'dear Jeffrey, let me show you something of what bourgeois life is really like. Come with me next Sunday to my parents' home. It's my mother's birthday. Come, and get a whiff of it; see it in the raw. It'll



be like going for a visit to a zoo, or an aquarium. Better still: a museum of un-natural history.'

'I'd like that.'

Lavinia said to herself: I'm going to do something impulsive right this minute. She stood up, leaned over Bowen's chair and kissed him squarely on the cheek.

Googie got up and said she was going to find a bottle of cognac. It took her a great deal of looking in the bedroom closet . . . 'You didn't say you had a roommate . . .' but she found it in the kitchen cabinet, subsequently. Lavinia had agreed, in the meanwhile, to have dinner alone with Jeffrey in his apartment the next evening.

## Chapter Five

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THE curly-haired office boy dragged himself into Lavinia's cubicle. 'Cold today!' he said. 'Isn't it!'

Lavinia leaned back in her chair. 'Cuts right through me. How does it affect you?' It was always such a pleasure to set a hypochondriac in motion.

He dropped the stack of interoffice envelopes in one of the wicker baskets on the long counter. 'Let me tell you. It hits me right here.' Arms akimbo, he turned like a fashion model and rubbed his hands in toward the small of the back. 'Kidneys! Goes right through them like razor blades. This weather's miserable for you. Breeds hepatitis. I knew a guy who lost one kidney because of the winter he was in the Army in Alaska. It's a terrible thing to lose a kidney. Do you have both kidneys?' He didn't wait for an answer. Turning back to face her, he picked up the envelopes for the next office and said, 'I'll have to leave early this afternoon. I'm going to my doctor for shots. It's the only thing you can do in this climate. The best thing would be if we could move New York down to Florida.' He almost smiled, but the effort seemed to exhaust him, so he shuffled out.

There was something so Ah-murr-ican about the boy's looks: that cross between Mickey Rooney and Van Johnson. Lavinia toyed with the idea that office boys are picked for

their looks. You never can tell when *Life* magazine might want to do a picture story about the company.

She was bent over the sketch of a pair of kelly green Pucci pants, when Vincent Guarcello sneaked in on his rubber-soled shoes. With one finger he played with the feathery blonde curls at the back of her neck.

'Morning, white girl.'

'What are you up to?'

'I'm about to act on my New Year's resolution.' He brought one of his business cards out of his shirt pocket. 'Doctored,' he said. 'Turn it over.'

His home phone number was penned in, along with the phrase, 'At all hours.'

Lavinia stared at it. 'I'm touched. I'm genuinely moved. This is the second telephone number I've been given within four days that I can call *for help* at all hours.'

'What was the first one?'

'Despair.'

'All right, don't tell me. Will you use it?'

'Perhaps.'

'I mean, will you use mine?'

'That,' Lavinia answered in monumental tones, 'is as unlikely as a blond Chinese.'

Vincent laughed. 'I may be the Luther Burbank of biology. Think about it. Let it grow on you. Don't throw that card away!' He caught her wrist just above the lip of the wastebasket. 'It's unlisted!'

Lavinia brought her pocketbook out of a drawer and tucked the card away behind the mirror. 'Vince,' she asked, 'can't we be just good friends?'

'Never,' he snapped, turned his back, and disappeared.

Jeffrey Bowen's presence grew in her all during the morning. The particular sound of certain words as he pronounced them; the sight of his lanky physique, the way in which he stared at the yellow roses in the light of the fireplace. He

was an enthusiast – about his work, of course; and sweet, fundamentally gentle, polite, and nice; yet unusual. Not the run of the mill, unimaginative ‘good boy’. Was it his special talent that set him apart? or his naïvety, his lack of experience because of his deprived childhood; that is, because he didn’t have all the disadvantages of being middle class?

As consciousness of his presence grew in her thoughts, she acted suddenly on what occurred to her as a gloriously impulsive idea. She telephoned Arthur Warden’s secretary. ‘Look,’ she said, ‘I don’t have any business asking about this, but do you still have the proof for an article by Jeffrey Bowen?’

‘The corrected proof or the uncorrected ones?’

‘It doesn’t matter.’

‘We have both.’

‘Would you mind if I came in during lunchtime and read them? I won’t take them out of the office.’

‘I wouldn’t mind.’

‘Well?’

‘Don’t you think we ought to ask Mr Warden?’

‘Yes, indeed,’ Lavinia said in a kitten-bitch voice, ‘I do think *we* ought to.’

‘Hold on a moment, please.’

She waited; after all, if he could use a skeleton key, she could read something of his a month before publication.

‘Mr Warden says you’ve done a favour for *Thought*, and *Thought* thinks well of you. It will be *his* pleasure. . . .’

The proof lay stretched out before her – all those precious, personal words by Jeffrey Bowen – two columns to a page on paper larger than the magazine’s format and of a quality that felt like the material butchers wrap meat in. Alone in the anteroom to Warden’s office, a windowless, oak-paneled chamber with six blue leather chairs and two small tables, with black and white linoleum blocks on the floor and racks of American Revolutionary rifles on one wall

(part of Mr Wheelwright's collection), she fondled the proof as privately and intimately as if she were about to read a love letter under a tree in a park, in sunlight, in spring. Then she began to scan the lines.

'Automation . . . cybernetics . . . cybernation . . . Automation . . . steel mills, coal mines, engine blocks . . . weave, roll, manufacture, sort and grade . . . computers . . . versatile automatic fabricators . . . at the other end of the continuum . . . design, traffic flow, programmed . . . input, process, output, storage . . . variables and contingencies . . . This is no fantasy . . . utility and applicability . . . originality and unpredictability . . . teach itself generalizations . . . Human action is a feedback action . . . potentialities . . . unlimited . . . electronic sales girl . . . computer . . . input, process, output, storage . . . By the end of this decade . . . problem of retaining, problem of retraining . . . Some proposed solutions . . . unemployment factors . . . whatever else one's attitude might be . . . Collective ingenuity . . . locality, industry, organization . . . time and planning . . . influence . . . systems . . . beam indexing tube . . . I cannot explain here in full detail . . . Criterion of success . . . we cannot exclude the possibility . . . insofar as we are now in a position to say . . . the invention-stimulating atmosphere . . . parallel to saying . . . Therefore, no universal science . . . but probability theory can . . . the computer . . . input, process, output, storage . . . minimization of the irrational . . . higher degree: stronger sense of necessity . . . margin of imperfection . . . transistors wear out, etc. . . . waves . . . Computer as a physical "body" affecting "mind" . . . unpredictable way . . . i.e., the machine would develop an unconscious . . . Not only vitalistic, but organic . . . input, process, output, storage . . . Term . . . key-term . . . archetype . . . Link organic to the inorganic . . . very likely, highly

probable . . . connection is Electricity! . . . theory of electricity . . . quantify . . . quantity . . . quantum . . . quality . . . Electricity! . . . simulate reality . . . particular . . . general . . . universal . . . input, process, output, storage . . . Conclusion: Probable . . . Possible . . . Likely . . . Benefits. . . . Unemployment! . . . Computers! . . . Electricity! . . . Perhaps.'

Lavinia fell back against the chair, clutching the page proof to her. It was superb.

Jeffrey Bowen was the first genius she had ever met personally, come to know intimately. Here was the evidence. It was exactly what she had hoped for. Incomprehensible. All the way beyond her. How crushed she would have been if she could have understood it. But she hadn't. She simply knew that she was in the presence of greatness. And that for her own, for her intimate, real, personal life – she had met, at last, a man who was smarter than she was.

She let herself face it now, squarely, fully. This is the man she wants for her life! Input, process, output, storage. The idea filled her with radiance, exalted her, inflated her. She stood up; she pranced slowly and majestically about the small room, with the feeling that she was exerting pressure on all four walls. They would have to give way. She gathered the pages together and replaced the paper clip. It felt in her hands like the Congressional Medal of Honor. She would glory in him. He made her feel commanding, infallible, exquisite. This man would be her husband, her lover, the father of her children. She pressed the page proof against her shoulder and tilted her head toward it, imagining their first child. She raised her free hand to burp it. Then she dropped it back to the table. What was she going to wear that evening?

Input, process, output, storage.

Her muscles tense, her neck firm, she opened her handbag and looked at her feather-cut blonde hair in the mirror. She

studied the shades of her iris-coloured eyes and the shapes of her eyebrows and lashes. She painted a fresh coat of cherry lipstick on her warm lips and flicked a pinhead of soot from her nose. She was a beautiful woman; she knew that. And he was a superb man: forthright, intense, spontaneous, and a genius. There he stood – ready for her, waiting for her, wanting her. There he stood on his pedestal, unique among men. He filled her with electricity. *Her man!* He would want to marry her, wouldn't he?

Lavinia stood statuesquely frozen in the centre of the room, her bag in one hand and the page proof in the other.

He did want to marry her, didn't he? Gradually, the soft sound of inner laughter reached her. 'Why should he?' the dwarf's voice asked. She reached for the sense of Jeffrey's presence; she could almost see him: high – on a pedestal.

'Why marry you?' the inner voice asked. 'He's not bourgeois. He doesn't have middle-class morality. His scruples aren't your scruples. He has nerve; he has imagination; he's mercurial. He didn't play it safe and go to college; he just got what he wanted; took what he wanted. Why not just take you? And then drop you when he doesn't want you any more. What's so special about you?'

'He wants to make love with me,' she replied. Lavinia closed her eyes and concentrated on the image of Jeffrey – smiling. Then he winked.

The little voice inside said coyly: 'Lots of pebbles on the beach. . . .'

'But he wants to make love with *me!*'

'A good lay is all you've got to offer? Will that buy him? Like "for keeps"?''

'No,' she said slowly. 'He's too good for that.' The rigidity of her pose was gone; she began to feel limp. All of the exalted tension sunk out of her body. Her spirit was deflated. The room came back to size. She leaned forward to one of the chairs and eased herself into it. Waiting. Watching

the image of Jeffrey Bowen ascend on its pedestal up through the ceiling of the room, up out of sight. She waited for the vicious inner voice to speak the truth. Jeffrey was a genius: she had the proof in her hands. And then the voice kept her waiting no longer. The Truth. Finally, it was said: '*He's too good for you.*'

She felt the tears welling in her eyes. 'Too good for you to marry, that is. But not too good to make use of you. He'll take you for what he thinks you're worth. And then pass you by – because, otherwise, he *is* too good for you. Too good.'

The great hollowness was all she felt. The loss. All of the electricity was switched off. Her existence – her body – felt like a long thin balloon; empty, a membrane covering nothing; a shell containing nothing. A zero. Crushed.

Input . . . process . . . output . . . storage.

She forced herself to leave. Passing through the office of Warden's secretary on her way to the corridor, she left the pages behind her, shamefully without a word. The tears slowly dripped down both cheeks. 'The secretary had never before seen anyone so moved by an article in *Thought*. Not even an author.

Even after she had survived a good cry in the isolation booth of the ladies' room, the sense of loss continued. All through the day at her desk and at her drawing board, Lavinia floated rudderless on the pale green sea. She worked at her sketches as if her hands were automatons, the automatic twitching of a frog's nervous system after the frog was dead. The art director came by and held his hand down on her wrist. 'Don't put another line into that,' he said, 'it's perfect just as it is.' He patted her on the back. 'You're great and you don't even know it. Besides, it's five o'clock.'

That was some help. There was some little feeling left at the bottom of her barrel. Life began to stir. If I can't be a



rocket, she thought, at least I can be a rock. People can count on me. I can do good work. A rock. A marker. A milestone on the road of fashion. The idea didn't seem as repulsive to her at this moment as it usually did.

She prepared for the evening with meticulous care. She bathed in rose-scented water, and dressed in her best black wool. She stroked herself with her most elegant perfume. About her neck she clasped a single strand of pearls and she brushed her golden hair down and forward about her face; imagining that she was making ready for a funeral or for a wake. She was already in ritual mourning for the loss of a loved one. He was *too good* for her. Every gesture of her preparations spelled it out. She was not good enough for him. Every element of her toilette repeated it. If she knew it from the start, she felt, she would suffer less in the long run. But suddenly the run looked infinitely long.

'You look gorgeous!' Googie shouted as she came into the bathroom.

'It's just a front.'

'Well, you know, it's what's up front that counts.'

'How flippant.'

'Pardon me for living.'

Lavinia followed her quickly into the living room. 'I'm sorry, Googie. Let's not fight. It's just that I feel so unworthy. So inferior.' Her arms hung at her sides; her shoulders slumped.

Googie took her hands and cupped them between hers. 'The Teacher always said that a sense of inferiority is the beginning of wisdom. If you don't feel inferior what would make you want to become superior? If you start out on top you have nowhere to go but down.'

'Up. Down. Circles. And arrows. It's beginning to wear me out.'

'You mustn't give up like this! You've got to fight. You've got to go out and get what you want.'

'And what if I can't have it?'

Just as enthusiastically, Googie answered, 'You've got to want what you can have!'

'Well, I'm not sure that clears the whole thing up. . . .'

It was no more settled than that when the doorbell sounded. Lavinia had her coat, scarf, hat, and gloves on in a flash. Googie followed her into the hall, hollering: 'Attack! - Attack! - Attack!'

Mr Bones waited in his fire-engine red British sports car, double parked opposite her front door. He greeted her with a kiss on the nose, and then strapped her into her cockpit seat. The freezing night air was more than bracing; it was petrifying. Lavinia felt like a piece of snow sculpture as they zoomed up one avenue and then another, along the west side of Central Park and then cut left toward the Hudson. Jeffrey Bowen lived on West End Avenue. 'In the last generation,' Jeffrey explained, 'this was the fortress of the middle-middle class and the test barrier to the upper-middle. But now it's on the skids. It's a holdout for the middle-middle and the breakthrough for the lower-middle; the side streets belong to the upper-lower, the middle-lower, and the lower-lower depending on how far north you go.'

'If you don't get me out of this deep freeze,' Lavinia's teeth chattered, 'you can lower-lower me into the cold-cold ground forever-ever.'

They had arrived.

The palatial entrance without a doorman or elevator operator gave the lobby an 'abandoned-city' appearance. Artificial orchids stood in pseudo-Wedgewood vases on the imitation Chippendale tables against both sides of the entrance to Jeffrey's apartment on the fourth floor.

Inside the foyer, Lavinia said, 'I rather thought you might live in a loft somewhere near Fulton Street.'

'I'll make a hot toddy for you with bourbon; how's that?' He disappeared into the kitchen. 'There are eight rooms,' he called from a distance, 'But I've furnished only the living-room and bedroom so far.'

'Chaos' was the pure concept that rose in perfect clarity to Lavinia's mind. There was no style, no recognizable system to the contents of the large room. Chairs, couches, and tables were grouped in roughly circular areas in each of the four corners; Louis XIV next to Hepplewhite; Biedermeier side by side with Bauhaus *moderne*. In the centre of the room was an immense marble-topped Renaissance table covered with books, papers, a typewriter, a teak filing cabinet, and a tray of liquor bottles. Browns, greens, greys, reds, purples, harlequin pillows, tapestry upholstery, – all against a wall-to-wall carpet of azure shot through with gold. Lavinia closed her eyes and felt faint for an instant.

'Cozy, isn't it?' Jeffrey said as he came toward her with a drink in each hand. Steam clouded up from the glasses with metal handles and bases; the kind of 'fixtures' you drink sodas from in an old fashioned drug store. 'Come, sit here,' he said, lowering himself into a mustard-velvet love seat behind a glass coffee table.

'Yes, "cozy" might be just the right word.' She sat next to him and sipped at the drink that promised to thaw her out.

'Let's pick up where we left off,' he said.

'When?'

'When I kissed your nose.' He leaned forward toward her chin. She leaned forward to put her glass on the table and he ended up kissing the top of her head. Then they both leaned back in their seats and stared at each other. Out of his Burberry 'foreign correspondent's' coat, he was dressed in plaid slacks and a black sweater. He actually wore a foulard ascot at his throat. 'You're very handsome,' she said slowly. (Googie re-echoing in her mind: 'Attack! – Attack!')

'I love you,' he said.

Their fingertips touched at the centre of the sofa.

'I love you,' she said.

Their fingers held each other's tightly.

'It's hopeless, I suppose,' he said.

'I suppose so,' she replied.

Their fingers dug into each other's hands.

'You're much too good for me, of course,' he said.

She laughed out loud and threw her hands up to her hot cheeks.

He leaped to his feet. 'Well, you don't have to ridicule me.' He thrust his fists into his pockets. '. . . even if it's true.'

'True?' she laughed. 'You've got it all wrong.' Holding out her arms, she drew him back to the sofa. 'It's just the other way around. *You're* much too good for me.'

'That's impossible.'

'Don't call me a liar.'

'Better a liar than a fool.'

'You're the fool.'

'Shut up!' he said.

She stood up.

He stood up.

They threw their arms about each other. And, then, fell back to the love seat clasped in each other's embrace. Each could feel the other's heart pounding madly.

'You're mad,' he said.

'You'll regret this,' she said.

They separated just enough so that their lips could meet.

When they paused for a sip of the toddy, it was considerably cooled. But delicious. 'Are you hungry?' he asked. 'I'll bring in the food.'

'Not unless you are.'

'No, thanks.'

They exchanged the words on the tips of their tongues, without articulating them.

His firm but tender hand explored off the road. Travelling south from the soft shoulder he hit the hill country. Beyond that, the back of his hand luxuriated in a valley. He followed a peninsula to a precipice and started on a return route, this time under cover of night. Reaching a stretch of territory

between two areas of silk he paused and stroked the bare flesh – fresh and smooth to the touch as a baby's body – pink to the mind: Like a coral beach in Bermuda. The back of his hand found identical territory lying side by side – as if Venus proved to be one of twins. The fingers of his other hand moved slowly down her spine like a spider lowering itself toward its prey.

Lavinia broke away from the kiss, gasping. She brushed the curls of hair out about her face with moist fingers. 'Have you had any news of your father?' she asked.

He withdrew his hand deftly along the length of her leg, removed her shoes. 'This'll make you more comfortable.'

'I was just beginning to become uncomfortable. . . .' she smiled.

He was about to put his arms around her again, when she drew up her knees and tucked her legs under her. 'What is there to eat?' she asked.

'Sandwiches.'

He brought in the tray from the kitchen. A large wooden tray cold to the touch, covered with Danish style, openfaced sandwiches; a slice of egg, a sardine, a pimento, a ham spread, a slice of salami, each on a sliver of rye or brown bread; along with a bottle of chilled white wine.

'Perfect,' she said; and meant it.

'*You* are!' he said, and kissed her cheek – on the outside of a sandwich bulge.

'You're not still chilly?' he asked. She shook her head emphatically. 'Too hot?'

'Nice girls don't say "hot".' She laughed.

'Why did you ask about my father?'

'To make conversation.'

'What an art!'

'As a matter of fact, now that I think of it, I would like to know. Any news?'

'A little. The detective agency turned up the information

that he was using the alias Roland Stone for a while, when he was a travelling folk singer in the late thirties. He's supposed to have had a very good voice. But he didn't make a go of it; always ahead of his time. Apparently he dropped that name and called himself Rover Bowen when he was a reporter for *P.M.* That was a newspaper in New York at the beginning of the war. But it's defunct. And they haven't turned up any news of him later than the Second World War.' Sadly, he added, 'What if he was killed in the war?'

'I don't feel that he was,' she said, absently stroking his cheek. They sipped the wine. 'Besides, a detective agency would have checked with the Army right off. No, I feel that he is still alive. But what if he turns out to be very different from what you expect?'

'I don't have any expectations. You see, that's where I'm at a disadvantage to begin with. When you grow up with a father in the house you start with all sorts of illusions and expectations and that makes it very easy for you to be disillusioned, so that when you go through adolescent revolt you recognize that your father's not such a big deal after all; it becomes very easy to transcend his influence. At the conscious level. Then you have the problem of reconstituting the father-image as part of your own psyche (if you're male, that is) at the unconscious level. It's just like everything else,' he sighed. 'It's so much easier to become a good bourgeois if you start out with a family inheritance of it.'

'You really are bugged by the idea of becoming middle class, aren't you?'

'Positively. As a matter of fact, I've got something here that I think might help you see why it's so important. I'd hate to think of you going astray, when you were on the right track to begin with.' He went to the long table at the centre of the room and pulled out a drawer of the flat teak cabinet. Bringing a mimeographed manuscript back with him, he smiled. 'I read it each morning. At least I have for

the past nine days – as long as I've had it; the way people used to read the Bible. It starts the day off on the right note. Are you ready?' he asked. 'Comfortable?'

'Excellent. I love being read to.'

He poured out the rest of the wine, cleared his throat, and began. 'It's called *The Ex-King*. Here goes.'

## THE EX-KING

Once upon a time – recently – there was an ex-king. Unlike many dethroned monarchs, he left his country without a private fortune. It was not that his countrymen disliked him; they had revelled in him. Theirs was a constitutional monarchy, and he had been a very attractive king. But the country itself disappeared. After the War, it was bankrupt. Too proud to take help from its lean neighbours on one side, it fell to the gluttony of a stout neighbour on the other side. The King Pou'Tzi was fortunate to escape with his life, and one string of antique diamonds, the sign of his kingship, the one Gift of his ancestors from which he was never separated.

Pou'Tzi's troubles began when he wilfully decided not to live off the fact that he had been a king. He was determined to stand on his own feet. This decision so outraged his disappointed young bride, the Queen Tou'Tzi – an adorable little thing but fantastically spoiled – that she promptly died of chagrin. Pou'Tzi was alone and had to take stock of himself.

Like all properly raised young monarchs, he had been schooled at Harrow and Cambridge, and spoke his native language with a British accent. Immediately upon his deposition he had fled from his kingdom to a great Republic. As he was now in a country where no worker's papers were required, and where no one would recognize his face, he was fired with the democratic enthusiasm to achieve a place for himself by his own

merit. He flushed with excitement at the very idea of such achievement. Unfortunately, he had no experience of what it meant. But he was determined to stand on his own feet. 'Most People do it,' he told himself; 'and now I am one of the Most People.' He burned his credentials. He shredded his papers of identification, and flushed his letters of introduction down a toilet. When he took a room at the Y.M.C.A., he adopted the name of Anthony Johnson, because it sounded like Most People's.

On his first day at the Y.M.C.A., he got into a conversation with a pimply boy named Chuck who told him about an opening for a job where he worked. The next morning he became a stock clerk for the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company. Every day he would get up at seven (just as he had on the mornings of fox hunts before breakfast). He would ride for forty minutes in the subway, watching the marvellous spectacle of so many people crowded together looking calm, proper, and unaware of each other (just the way people used to appear at his royal receptions). He would take the elevator down to the sub-cellar (just as he had on the day when he inspected a coal mine). And he spent eight hours stacking and unloading, loading and restacking great cartons of wonderful things (unlike anything he had ever done or seen before in his life). Then he would take the subway back for another forty minutes of the regal ceremony.

The day he received his first pay check, he tingled all over. He clutched it in his hands for hour after hour; and when he finally spent the first dollar he had earned, he placed it on the counter as if he were conferring a dukedom. He went to movies and he went to baseball games. He ate hamburgers and he read comic strips. But he began to feel somewhat lonely. He had no friends and no secretaries to arrange his appointments. No one



ever asked for an audience. Otherwise, he was content. He was standing on his own feet.

It was just after the beginning of his second month at the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company that an unexpected, simple experience squashed his contentment. At a subway station, he saw a poster for a resort hotel in the Far South. His shoes were slushy with snow, but in the poster picture the sun was shining and pretty girls wore bikinis on the beach. He reacted swiftly, according to his training, and made the official decision that he go South immediately. But when he took out his wallet he counted just enough money for a week's rent, the subway, three newspapers, one ball game and his food for the rest of the week.

For five days he never smiled at all. He looked at the people in the subway and in the elevator, in the restaurant and at the movies, and he realized – for the first time – that there was no royal reception going on at all. This was their daily life; their yearly life; their life's life. He was appalled. The blood seemed to drain out through his feet. He clasped the subway strap tight to keep from fainting. The thought came to him that now he knew the reason why people are willing to go to war: it gets them out in the fresh air, and it gives them a time when they don't have to be calm and proper or seem unaware of each other. Then he felt clear-headed; and speechlessly unhappy.

Gradually, by concentrating, he became completely miserable. Not especially for himself, but for Most People. At least, *he* had known something better. But all of these people who were standing on their own feet were standing still. Sooner or later they would 'go under' as if the earth opened up beneath them and covered them, and then someone else would be standing on his own feet on that same tiny plot of life. The ex-king wept. He wept as if he had been taken out of

doors on a cold and dark night to see the world for the first time, and he longed for the warmth and the happy brightness of his palace and the people who had made life merry for him.

But he knew all of that was gone forever, and now he truly was one of the Most People. For the first time he became terrified for himself. He realized that he might live his whole life rising at seven, riding in the subway, loading and restacking, and going to the movies. Now he wept for himself. Regret chewed away a big raw hole inside of the ex-king, for his foolishness in having destroyed his past, and he pitied himself for not being able to live off the fact that he once was a king.

A bitter decision ended this tear-wet time. He would sell a diamond from the string of his ancestral Gift. He was determined to begin again, with more respect for what he had been, with more realism, with the hope he might not only stand on his own feet but move forward as well. 'Forward,' at that time, amounted to a few weeks at the resort in the Far South. It was *a goal*.

One antique diamond, without historical or ceremonial associations, did not bring him a great deal of money. But enough for the ex-king to move to the capital of The Republic, rent a room, and begin the search for an occupation more nearly appropriate to his background. He had been raised to represent, if not direct, the course of his native country's politics, and so he applied for a position with his adopted country's government. He continued to call himself Anthony Johnson. During his first weeks in the capital he met two other men who, also, were named Anthony Johnson. They both had jobs with the government. That encouraged him.

He went directly to the Department of Foreign Affairs and applied for a position concerned with relations

between The Republic and his former Kingdom. He explained that he had been educated at Harrow and Cambridge; and that he would be a credit to any diplomatic reception. The personnel interviewer was polite but incredulous and asked for further qualifications. 'What is it, exactly, you are trained for?' she asked.

'I have been trained to understand, criticise, and evaluate the decisions of administrators, to pass judgment on the acts of legislators, and to reconsider the adjudications of Justices.'

'I see,' the personnel interviewer said. 'Yes, yes; I believe I see. It's unfortunate but all of the positions for which you are suited are filled in this country by popular election. I'm sorry. But . . . You say you know The Kingdom's language? Would you be interested in a job as a translator?'

'Yes. Surely!' he said.

'It's a very routine job. Might get pretty boring.'

Thoughtlessly he said, 'That doesn't matter.'

'Well, good. We'll keep your name. There's no opening at the moment, but you can never tell when there might be. Don't call us. We'll call you.'

The ex-king went from one personnel office to another. The interviewers were always polite. They would listen to his qualifications and say, 'What a shame. We just filled a place you would have been great in. Just last week. But it's filled.' Or they would say, 'Fine. Very interesting. It's just that, well right now, what we need is an engineer. If you were an engineer we would place you this afternoon. But you didn't say you were an engineer, did you?'

At the end of six weeks, Pou'Tzi felt he had done his best, but there was no call for professional leadership on the market. Those who had been trained in kingship

were simply not in demand. He refused to put another one of his diamonds up for sale. Some things have to be preserved, regardless of the price you have to pay to keep them intact. There are some things a man is responsible to pass on to future generations. He had to keep that inviolable.

It occurred to the ex-king that he might make a career of teaching in a University. He was certainly a first-rate scholar in his Kingdom's history, politics, literature, and music; to say nothing of the national sport – dunking for pomegranites. So he travelled about to the great institutions of learning in the East, and wrote letters to the schools of the Far West; but nothing came of it. The Deans and Chairmen he spoke with, and those who wrote him, seemed enthusiastic at first. But, when he was unable to produce scholastic records from Harrow and Cambridge in the name of Anthony Johnson, the Deans and Chairmen discovered to their regret that their staffs were complete for the coming few years.

By the end of three months, the ex-king found that he had almost completely exhausted his diamond money. Lonely and fearful he returned to his room in the capital feeling unwanted, lost, and bitter at the thought that he might have to go back to rising at seven, riding the subway, unloading and stacking cartons for the rest of his life, in order to keep the ancient Gift to himself. He played with the idea of romantically bequeathing the diamonds to the national art gallery, and then committing suicide. But he realized how un-sportsmanly that would be. He hadn't gone to Harrow for nothing. But he had made no friends, and he saw nothing creditable in the people he had met. The fact that they were unable to perceive the value of his training for kingship was enough, in his eyes, to condemn them.

But – miraculous as it seems – at that very moment, a

telegram came saying there was a job for him as translator at the Department of Foreign Affairs. He took it; and got a desk in an office with six other men. The job *was* routine and soon it *did* become boring, but the ex-king did the job competently and he was satisfied for the time being. The other men were agreeable, and there was a red-haired stenographer who smiled cheerfully at him. She smiled cheerfully at the other men, too.

One morning she entered the office brightly and asked, 'What do you know?'

The ex-king answered, with the seriousness of one who has learned it the hard way, 'A five cent stamp costs five cents.'

The girl laughed out loud. From then on, whenever she entered the office, she smiled at him as if they shared a secret. One evening, when Pou'Tzi was the last to leave, the red-headed stenographer stopped him to say, 'When are you going to ask me for a date?' The ex-king was hesitant and wary, but the next evening, Tobi Charmiss took him to a party. The other guests also worked for the government, or they were lawyers, doctors, and business men. Pou'Tzi was ill at ease among the white collars, but he tried to be amicable. He was somewhat stiff and formal, but once he made a funny remark; and he listened beautifully. At the end of the evening, Tobi whispered close to his ear, 'That wasn't so bad, was it?' At the breath of the whisper, his face flushed and his skin goose-fleshed in a way that it hadn't for so long he hardly recognized it for what it was.

Tobi Charmiss had a camel's-hair coat and a convertible car. Pou'Tzi and she began to go out with each other at least once a week. She was popular and she often took him to parties with her. She was well-built – almost plump with healthfulness – and her flesh was all

freckled, over every bit of her. She had been kicked out of college a month before graduation because of a wild week-end, which hadn't been cleared with the Administration. Her father was dead and her mother sent her silk dresses and fat checks for holidays. Pou'Tzi showed surprise when she told him about that, as if he had suddenly been reminded to feel for the slightly insecure feet he was now standing on.

'That's what families are for,' she explained.

Some evenings they would stroll through the humid air along the great Mall in the centre of the capital and he began to talk freely with her as if he had just learned the language. 'It's so strange,' he said, 'so silly. Of course, the sure thing about having a come-uppance is that you never believe you need it until you've gone through it. I've discovered so many things so late. First, I discovered that everything costs money, and that you have to earn it. Ordinary people learn that when they're six years old.'

'Some people never learn it at all,' she consoled him.

'When I was a child, my family was very rich. I used to stand at one of the large windows of our pal . . . our place and watch the people pass by. Gardeners, policemen, students, flower vendors, office workers. And I used to wonder, "Is it possible that each one of them really has a life of his own? Can their lives be full of people who make them happy, of books, an music, and trips to the country - as mine is?" I never wanted to answer the question, because deep down I didn't believe there was enough to go around, their lives couldn't really be as much alive as mine. But I told myself it didn't matter because they probably just didn't care.'

The red-haired Tobi listened silently.

'I've come a long way,' the ex-king continued. 'I live in a different country; and I have to make out on my

own.' Their arms were locked and they walked along slowly as one clumsy animal in the warm evening air. 'Now I look at people all the time thinking, "Is it possible that each one of them really stands on his own feet? Can they really live from week to week with no more delight than the movies bring them? wondering if they can afford a new suit; looking for a better apartment; worrying about paying doctor's bills for the baby . . ." I can't pretend that it doesn't matter because I'm one of them now myself and I know they really do care.' He did not try to answer any of his questions – as if he stood outside in the cold darkness again and did not believe there was anyone who understood his language near enough to hear.

Then Tobi said, 'They don't do it alone.'

The ex-king thought of the dead Queen Tou'Tzi, and cringed.

Taking Tobi home from a concert one night, Pou'Tzi chanced to make some derogatory remarks about the mediocre accountant and the salesgirl who lived in the next apartment. Tobi stopped him short with 'You think you're pretty damned special, don't you!'

'Yes, I suppose so.'

'It must be very lonely.'

'Is it any less lonely for those who don't . . .!'

Tobi made no reply. But instead of inviting him into the apartment that evening, she made him leave her at the door. After he had turned away from her, she called him back and took off the rosebud she had pinned to her dress and pressed it into his hand without a word, sending him away with an urging, hopeful stare.

They never referred to his criticism of her friends, until Pou'Tzi, putting his arm around her shoulder one day, spontaneously said, 'I've been wrong about so many things. I've judged people badly, and I'm sorry. But I've been thinking now. When I lived like

Most People, I thought that was living death; and then I imagined the life of the white collar was just as pointless and hollow in its own way. It's really not that bad. It isn't a question of whether people are rich or poor, powerful or tools, charming or dull; the only thing that's really important is whether they're good or mean.'

Tobi laughed, 'At least, that's what matters to Other People.' She smiled and kissed the ~~ex-king~~, a whole flock of kisses about his face, and said passionately, 'I love you, you child, you sweet baby man-child, I love you!'

For two days Pou'Tzi felt himself to be in a state of radioactivity.

When a king comes from a country where he had been *universally loved* – not in any sense for himself as a person but because it is fitting that a nice king should be properly loved – it is difficult for him to grasp the meaning of being loved even by only one person – in a Republic – out of nothing but recognition for himself as a person. However, even he *can* grasp it. He may not know what to do with it, but he can grasp it with both hands.

'What is it, darling?' Tobi asked, watching his drawn, questioning face. 'What are you worrying about?'

'It's only that I don't want to be just another translator, just another refugee from my Kingdom, just another husband, just another . . .' His voice trailed off in sadness.

'You can't escape that,' she said. 'Everyone is "just another" something. You distinguish yourself by your excellence in whatever you are.'

He knew what she said made good sense, but still he looked unhappy. 'What is it you think you ought to be?' she asked.

He said apologetically, 'A king.'



‘ “Just another” king?’

Clear-headed, they laughed together, and they hugged each other happily. She said, ‘Everyman’s home is his castle.’

That struck him as the most original thought he had ever heard. Looking at her hands as he held them in his, he said, ‘There’s so much I ought to tell you. . . .’

‘What about?’

‘About my past.’

‘But it is difficult for you. Why does it trouble you?’

‘I had sworn to myself that I would never disclose it.’

‘You don’t have to tell me.’

‘But I want you to marry me. I want you to *want to* marry me.’

‘You want a wife, don’t you? Not a father confessor.’ He didn’t need to know about her past, and so he believed that they had the same kind of trust in each other.

‘There is something I have for you,’ he said. ‘It is the only precious thing I can offer you.’

‘Besides yourself,’ she smiled.

‘It is this string of gems.’ He watched her eyes as he placed the diamonds in her hands. ‘Do you want me to tell you about them?’

‘Not if you don’t want to.’

And he didn’t want to; he didn’t need to. He clasped the string of diamonds about her neck. She wore them without vanity, knowing nothing of their antiquity nor their grandeur – the sign of his kingship. She wore them without pride but in the fact that they were *his* gift to her. He knew then that she would cherish and protect his Gift with loving kindness, not because of them, but because of him. She would preserve the sign of his tradition upon her as he would preserve the essence of his kingship within himself.

They eloped. They jumped into her convertible, drove off, and got married. That winter they took a belated honeymoon at the resort in the Far South. Today, Anthony Johnson is a senior translator in the Department of Foreign Affairs. He does well; he will rise. He may be happy. In one year of discovery he learned much: even that it is possible to stand on his own feet, be clear-headed, and move forward some of the time; and to be goose-fleshed on the outside and radioactive on the inside – some of the time.

He had finished the story. Lavinia sat there staring at him. 'It's sweet,' she said.

'Sweet? It's profound!' he shouted. 'You know – like Thurber.'

'Who wrote it, Jeffrey?'

'My psychoanalyst.'

She laughed. 'Does he give a copy to each of his patients?'

'I don't know. It's a parable.'

They had finished the wine. He brought a bottle of liqueur from the centre table and poured a glass for each of them.

'You did see that it was a parable, didn't you?'

Lavinia nodded over her drink.

'It's actually about all of us,' he continued, 'growing into maturity, assuming responsibility. You see – psychologically speaking, – each of us thinks of himself as a little king in childhood. Only gradually, as we get out into the world beyond our families, do we discover that we have to grow up; establish ourselves for what we are; not live with the delusions of being worthy of "the best of everything" just because we exist. We have to earn it.'

'And the diamonds?'

'One's inherited talents, capacities, potentialities. At least, that's what I think they represent. The man entrusts the best use of them to the woman he gives himself over to.'

'Like the ending of a Hollywood movie,' Lavinia said.

'Everything that ends with a marriage and "they lived happily ever after" is in the service of society or the human species. Everything that ends unhappily is in the service of individual existence. The world of literature is divided by two camps: those books whose whole point is that "You are *not* alone", and those whose point is "You are only alone"! I'm quoting my English professor at Smith,' she admitted.

'Why sneer?' Jeffrey asked. 'Do you *want* to be alone?'

'Well, I have to make something of myself first. Then I'll think about sharing it.'

'How? I mean: what do you want to make of yourself?'

'An artist.'

'If you have the talent,' he said, not unkindly.

'Yes, of course. If I don't have the talent to make something *very special* of myself, I think I'll kill myself.'

'Why?'

Lavinia snorted. 'If a thing's worth doing at all, it's only worth doing well.'

Jeffrey said, 'I've always thought that if a thing's worth doing, it's worth doing badly.'

'I've never thought of it that way!'

'That's because you're a true-blue bourgeois; and you see how high the standards of the middle class are, now, don't you?' Lavinia shrugged her shoulders. 'I'll tell you,' he went on. 'This is the way I see it. You want to get over being bourgeois. The question is whether your talent will save you.'

'And you,' Lavinia interrupted, 'want to become bourgeois, and the question is whether your analysis will make it possible for you.'

'Right.'

'What if your analysis doesn't work?'

'What if you don't have enough talent?'

Silence. They lighted cigarettes.

'Well,' Jeffrey said, 'you're not bad off as you are.'

'You know that I prefer you as you are.'

He moved closer to her and took both of her hands in his.

'There's one great drawback to the way I am now: I'm not good enough for you.'

'No, no, Jeffrey. It's just the other way around. I have to make myself worthy of you.'

'By destroying what I admire most about you?'

She scowled and withdrew her hands from his, saying, 'While you try to make of yourself exactly what I least admire.'

They both laughed, and threw their arms around each other. 'I'll bring you some of the Bourgeois Anonymous literature,' she whispered in his ear.

'And I'm going to your parents' home for your mother's birthday.'

'And I'll take you to a cell meeting.'

'And I love the feel of your ass.'

'And . . . ' Lavinia kept her mouth shut. Against his.

After she'd opened it again – somewhat later – she said, 'I think you'd better take me home now.'

To her surprise and chagrin, he said, 'Yes, of course,' disengaged himself and stood up. He came back from the hall with her coat, while she was putting on fresh lipstick.

'Pleasant evening?' she asked, coyly.

'Good beginning.'

'We must do it again sometime.'

'Tomorrow night,' he said with authority.

'It's a date.'

The next evening Lavinia did not put on a dress. She wore faded blue jeans below and only a large beige loose-knitted Norwegian sweater above. It was an outfit she was fond of from the time of her dates at Smith – in autumn and in springtime, for strolls around the lake. It was called 'the wrestler's uniform' at her dormitory. So convenient. It was light weight, but she would wear Googie's beaver coat in the car. She was dressed for action. (Attack! Attack!)

Her last preparation was to select one of the pamphlets

to take with her. She went through the stack of them spread out on the daybed. *How Bourgeois Anonymous Works. Report of the Joint Committee on Individuality. The Bourgeois Can Now Be Helped.* Some looked like reprints of private magazine articles. Others were brochures with bright colours. Most were cheaply printed, with unsophisticated designs. *Bourgeois Hygiene*, Vol. 1, No. 6 Subtitled – *The Middle Class and Crime*. No. 7 was *The Middle Class and Disease*. No 8 was *The Middle Class and Neurosis*. The one with the green jacket bore the title *A Sociologist Looks at Bourgeois Anonymous*; Subtitle – *Bourgeois Anonymous Looks Back*. The grey-blue one was called *Know the Enemy*. The blood-red read *How to be Different and Like It*.

Lavinia decided on the grey-blue, *Know the Enemy*. That's what Jeffrey needed most; that was what he was least aware of. The nature of the danger. The truth about the vision that had him under its spell. That was the pamphlet she slipped into her purse. She felt evangelical and sexy at the same time.

They went out to dinner at an Italian restaurant in the Village. With the exception of the three waiters, Jeffrey Bowen was the only man in the place with a necktie on. But most of the girls wore loose fitting beige sweaters over faded blue jeans.

Back in his apartment, Jeffrey prepared Scotch and soda for both of them. The radio played soft music. They took up their stations on the velvet love seat. There was only one soft light nearby. Jeffrey switched it off. He was silhouetted by the light filtering from the hallway.

'Kiss me,' she said.

He did.

'Any news of your father?' she asked.

'Kiss me!' he said.

She did.

'Have you bought your mother's birthday present yet?' he asked.

'Let's wrestle!' she said.

He took off his tie, his jacket, and his shirt. 'Now it's fair,' he said. And they started to wrestle. The excellence of the design of her uniform proved its facilities admirably. Through his T-shirt she luxuriated in his lithe swimmer's muscles. Along her leg she felt the marvel of his polar exploration. The bout continued seven rounds and ended in a draw.

'You're so beautiful,' he said.

'You're so handsome.'

'You're so talented, charming, feminine, and - round.'

'You're so brilliant, clever, masculine, and - straight.'

They kissed some more.

Then she stood up and said, 'There's something I have to get from my bag.'

He stood up and switched on the light. 'Just a minute, isn't that rushing things a bit?'

Only in the hallway did she get the implication; but she ignored it. 'I promised to bring you one of the Bourgeois Anonymous publications. I'm a woman of my word.' Jeffrey was freshening up the drinks.

'All right,' he said. 'If you'll read it aloud.' And she did. Dramatically.

## KNOW THE ENEMY

As Mark Twain once said: Everyone talks a lot about conformity, but nobody does anything about it.

Why? Because they're too stupid? Not on your life. It isn't a matter of intelligence. What is it a matter of? It's a matter of guts, nerve, verve, will, and imagination. It is a matter of *belief*.

Why do people conform? Because they are afraid. Afraid of what? Of being laughed at. Of losing a job. Of being alone. Of losing face. Of being themselves. Of losing love. Of being ridiculed. Of losing rights. Of being ostracized. Of losing privileges. Of being

different. Of losing orientation. Of being unique. Of losing security. Of being human. Of losing anchor, mooring, and a map. Of being on their own, and alive!

That's quite a mouthful, but it sums it up.

Still, what does it tell you? *How to do it?* No. How to cultivate your best self? How to become an independent human being? No. Statements like these don't do that. (See Bourgeois Anonymous Public Information Pamphlet Number 19. *How to do it.*) Nevertheless, it is important to know why people conform, and to know what conformity means. It is important to look it in the face and recognize it for what it is. No matter what campaign you are about to undertake, it is of the utmost importance to know the enemy. And for us – the enemy is the *conformity* of the *bourgeoisie*.

*Who* is the enemy? And why are they afraid? Answer: the bourgeoisie who completely dominate our society. The fact that they are dominant is the ultimate consequence of political democracy and an economy of (so-called 'free') capitalist enterprise. The landed aristocracy, what little there is of it, has completely degenerated. The proletariat wastes its energy – both collective and individual – in aping the middle class. And the rugged individualists, robber barons, self-made' captains of industry are as dead and fossilized as dinosaurs in museums. The organization man is the fact of life so predominant that it blankets the entire field of *all skilled labour* from the presidents of steel corporations (who came up through the ranks of the accounting department) to the medical doctor (who is just an organization man of the A.M.A.); from the school teacher to the chorus girl; from the cowboy to the insurance salesman; from the pro baseball player to the prophylactics manufacturer. No need to go on listing; when we say *all*, we mean *all*.

What makes every organization man, every skilled

labourer, bourgeois? The desire to be a nice guy; that is, the desire to be just like everybody else. And everybody else in this picture is just a jello-smooth, scared, homogenized schnook.

It isn't what one does to make a living that determines whether he is bourgeois or not; it's *how* he lives that matters. What he thinks life is and how it ought to be enjoyed. No matter whether one earns \$5,000 a year or \$50,000 a year, the dead give-away of the bourgeois is what he dreams the ideal life would be – the earthly paradise he longs for and tries to approximate.

Is it simple? Can it be characterised in a few words? You bet it is. Is it a dream of nobility? Of achievement? Of salvation? Is it saintliness? Is it self-sacrifice in the service of country? church? social well-being? the subject matter of an art, a science, or a craft? Not on your life. It can be characterized in a few words all right. It's nothing but this: The Playboy and the Plaything. The dream of perfection for every bourgeois male is to be eternally about twenty-five years old and rich enough to be nothing but a playboy. The dream of perfection for every bourgeois female is to be eternally about nineteen and sexy enough to seduce one playboy after another. That's it in a nutshell (pardon the flippancy); we mean, in a nutshell.

These perpetual dual personalities, trying to live their nice little lives in nice little houses, with nice little children doing nice little things and going to nice little places which they visit with their nice little friends from one nice little year in through the next nice little year out – maintaining always in spirit the hot-eyed longing and the lust for the ideal of the playboy and the plaything – these are the enemy; and their kind of life is the trap to be feared worse than death.

But to really know the enemy is to understand the



nature of their conformity. They conform to each other's manners and mores, legal and illegal, sensations and emotions, moral and immoral; for them all of living has become a matter of etiquette – namely, follow the models already established, know the forms, learn the rules, and you will be safe. Now we are getting close to the heart of the matter. You bet.

Why is this state of things, you ask. What could have led so vast a majority of our society into the behaviour of ants, of social bees, of initiates in some antique priestly class? The answer is not political or sociological: it is not economic or psychological; it is metaphysical! The answer is not in Freud's death wish nor in Sartre's description of the longing to become like an inanimate object. Not on your life. The answer is summed up in the awareness that bourgeois conformity is based on the metaphysical assumption that, *if* life is a problem – the problem has been solved. *All of the problems of life have been solved!* The bourgeois pretends to have 'The final solution' to The Life Problem.

If only you learn the system of solutions, you need have no fear, for there is already an answer to every question. Life is not a matter of intuitions, of thoughts or feelings . . . it is a system of ritual expressions and traditional actions. Life is a 'closed system'. And to live well, to live 'properly' – you have only to be on the inside of that system. It is, in brief, an individual repetition-syndrome neurosis expanded to include a whole civilization. Do only the same things over and over again; say only the same words over and over again; feel always the same responses over and over again – Everybody!

This is the religion of the bourgeoisie.

Historians may trace it to German Protestantism, to the Evangelical British, to the Old Testament Puritanism of the Jews, but it has long since lost touch with

any (so-called) religious experience. That's just the poetry of bad dreams, anyhow. By now it is exclusively metaphysical. As everyone knows: metaphysics is what remains when religion peters out – like the tin left underneath when silver plate wears away.

Why is the conformity of the bourgeoisie mediocre?

Because it is the lowest sort of lowest common denominator. Because it assumes that there is a pat answer for every question; and requires that it be simple enough for the most simple of minds to grasp. The way of life of the bourgeoisie is a patent way, therefore there is no margin for innovation, no necessity for variety, no need to escape, no function for fantasy, no novelty – and no resources of imagination to call on in crisis. Where it is assumed that the way of life is perfect, any variation is a despicable lessening of perfection.

Conflict, crisis, spontaneity, human drama, change and newness, are the evils that lurk outside of the closed system. Life – pure, shining, goodie, good-good, nice-nice little life as the bourgeoisie sees it – is devoid of crisis and conflict. They spell trouble. And trouble is not part of life. Human beings should always be in harmony. The bourgeois prefers to live in the make-believe of what 'should be' – sacrificing the chance to discover what actually is. There *should be* no trouble among people. Trouble is the foui demon, the serpent in the Garden of Eden. 'Trouble' is reified\* as the evil spirit come to destroy the well-earned sleep of the Macbeths of Middletown. Trouble, crisis, conflict come with differences of opinion, taste, values, luck – and have all the irrationality of love – regrettably! And trouble rocks the boat. Such a happy boat. (Don't make waves!) Don't raise doubts. It's such lovely

\* *Raification* is the fallacious treatment of abstract nouns as though they were proper names and denoted abstract entities in much the same way as proper names denote individuals.—B.A. Board of Editors.

weather for this lovely excursion on this lovely boat; now, everybody, just unlace and enjoy it. You're entitled. Just BE NICE. Everything is not only perfectly all right; everything is gorgeous! How can one dare to disturb it? Has there ever been such a wonderful country? Has there ever been such happy people? such nice people? Has there ever been better goodness? 'Never!' answers the bourgeoisie in chorus. And – believe it or not – they *believe* it.

Now you know the enemy? You'd better.

Not only the enemy without – but the enemy within? It is not only those bourgeois other than yourself who are identifiable by these signs; the bourgeois in your own spirit is, too.

If you understand this much, then surely your next question must be, where do you go from here? (Suggested further reading: Bourgeois Anonymous Public Information Pamphlet No. 18, *Where Do You Go From Here?*)

End of publication 12A.

Mr Bones said, 'It's a gasser.'

'You don't believe it?'

'No. What I mean is – it's not a question of whether I believe it's true or not; I don't know if it's true. But – I just don't know how important it is, considering what's left out.'

'What is left out?'

'Well, it certainly doesn't contain *my* idea of the bourgeoisie.'

'Which is?' Lavinia curled her legs up under her on the seat and cupped her highball glass with both hands.

Jeffrey began: 'Responsibility. It doesn't say anything about the fact that it's the bourgeoisie that keeps things going. Invents things. Makes things. Distributes them. Sells them. Runs things: offices, organizations, societies, groups, governments. It doesn't have any respect for that

responsibility. Or, for that matter, it doesn't have any respect for the responsibility of maintaining a home and raising children.'

'Oh . . .' Lavinia condescended, 'you mean the nice little house with the nice little mouse . . .'

'You make it sound both easy and contemptible.'

'It is.'

'You're wrong. Do you have any idea of the statistics – in this country for the past year alone – on how many husbands abandoned their wives and children?'

'I don't understand statistics. They're Arabic numerals to me.'

'Don't be funny. I'm talking about my father; and I'm talking about a hundred thousand other fathers roaming around the country at this moment. They didn't have that much sense of responsibility. They didn't care that much. They weren't that strong.'

'Strong? Don't *you* be funny! I'm thinking of *my* father, now. Strong? Responsible? His life of least resistance is the very activity described by the Law of Inertia.'

'But I'm thinking of myself as a father. It's strength that I'd have to have, not inertia, for me to marry and settle down and make myself responsible for the well-being of a wife and children.'

Lavinia was silent now and expressionless. They stared at each other; but she saw the reverie of herself in an apron with a boy-child on one side of her and a girl-child on the other – at the front steps of their suburban house, welcoming home her husband, Dr Jeffrey Bowen, from a hard day at the office – with a chilled Martini outstretched in one hand, and a platter of hors d'oeuvres in the other. She erased the image quickly; embarrassed; it was obscene; it was a betrayal.

Jeffrey sounded as if he was talking to himself: 'But that's the kind of responsibility I'd take on myself, if I were strong enough.'

Lavinia touched his face with her fingertips, called him 'The Ex-King,' and smiled tenderly.

'If the analysis works,' he added. Then, seeming to snap out of a trance, he asked briskly, 'What would you do if you were strong enough? You – hating the middle class life as you do.'

'I'd burn my bridges and be a bum. I'd take my paint box and an armload of canvas and travel around to see the world and I'd paint all the worlds I see – looking inside as well as out. And I wouldn't have any responsibility at all. Responsibility is just a stuffy word for letting yourself get stuck and learning to like it.'

'You mean: having had a chance to be a Plaything, now you want a fling at being a Playboy.'

'You're bright; you learn quickly. No denying that. But I don't like the implications. A Playboy doesn't do any work. I'd live for my work.'

'How long do you think you could keep it up?'

'I don't know. It's questions like that that "sickly o'er the resolution" and all that sort of thing.'

Jeffrey laughed. 'What perfect bourgeois romanticism, escapism, Alice-Through-The-Looking-Glassism.'

Lavinia stared at him with anger, with passion, with the eager desire to destroy his scorn with a leap onto a ship, with one brash I'll-show-himism. The sense of her actually running away to carry out the scheme, to be free as a bum and irresponsible toward every person and every thing but her art, struck her with such immediacy that she felt as though this would be their last moment together. She set the glass on the table and thrust out both arms. 'Enough of this love-making,' she said. 'Let's kiss!'

They kissed. Lavinia switched off the lamp behind the couch. The cold bulb in the hall cast the room in a pseudo-moonlight. They kissed some more.

And then they fondled. They petted, and they tickled, and they necked. Then they kissed and they petted and they

necked and they fondled. They wrestled. More anatomy lessons in braille. Lavinia was excited, stimulated, anticipatory, expectant. She might even have been said to be hot; but nice girls (themselves) don't *say* 'hot'.

Jeffrey Bowen broke away in the midst of a fondling petted neck, under cover of a tickle. He stood up. In the dim light he discreetly adjusted his clothing to disguise his expanded spirit; he paced the length of the room in silence; and took a deep breath. Then he switched on the overhead light and said: 'I guess I'd better take you home. It's after midnight.'

Lavinia said: 'Tomorrow's Saturday.'

'But *I* have to work. Warden wants to see me at the office for some last minute changes.'

Lavinia got up and went to the closet for her coat. Sullenly she let herself feel all of her emotions as they rushed up through her. Cheated! she felt. Put off. Insulted. It was perfectly clear that she was sore as hell at being insulted. He had not tried to make love. He had stopped short. Whatever his reason was – she would be damned if she'd pretend that it was 'perfectly all right; just ducky; charmed, I'm sure.' Wasn't he man enough?

As she reached for the closet hanger, he came up behind her and she felt his full façade against her back. He held her about the waist and stroked her hair with the other hand. There was no question about his being man enough. 'Until tomorrow night,' he said. 'Will that be okay?'

'*Perfectly* all right,' she answered. She tilted her head back to his shoulder and he kissed her ear. Not being able to keep from laughing, she added: 'Just ducky; charmed, I'm sure!' and swung around to hug him.

Saturday night they went dancing. Over the nightclub table, small as a chess board, they stared at each other with wonder and respect. He thinking: what would it feel like to be a natural-born bourgeois? She thinking: how does it

feel being a genuine incast? Then, on the dance floor, they pressed close against each other as if they'd suddenly remembered the cold of the winter night out of doors and needed to huddle together surrounded by other bundling couples to become warm again.

Lavinia whispered, 'Whisper sweet nothings in my ear.'

Jeffrey whispered, 'Sweet nothings. Sweet nothings.'

'No, silly. I mean tell me sweet words. . . .'

'Honey,' he said. 'Stuffed dates. Halva. Baclava. Marzipan. And sugar plums. Cherry tarts. And baked alaska.'

'What are you doing – reading the menu?'

'I'm thinking of things to compare you with. The elegant, delicious well-bred things that are like you.'

She leaned back so that she could look into his eyes. 'I think you really do love me,' she said at last.

'You'd better believe it!'

'I will – if you won't use it against me.'

'I will use it against you; I just won't abuse it against you. I'll cause you as little pain as possible. I'll do everything I can to make you as happy as possible, and thereby make myself as happy as I can be. I'm each-other-centred!'

'You're what?'

'Each-other-centred. That's a phrase my analyst uses. It puts the emphasis on the relationship rather than on one member of it. What's in the centre between us is something different from either you or me. Our this-ness.'

'You mean – "thisness is bigger than both of us"?''

'Something like that.'

'You know: you're really a most remarkable man. It's such a delight that you operate on a plane so much higher than mine. I keep being surprised by what comes out of you.' She did not add out loud the thought: and I keep being reminded that you're too good for me.

What he said was: 'I'm trying to make you believe I'm worthy of you.'

That saddened her all the more, thinking – I have no

personality, no individuality. At least: this is what I got out of a college education. The idea that *underneath* I consist of universal biological drives that are just like everyone else's and have no personal character; and on the *surface* I'm all encrusted and painted over and decorated with socially conditioned manners, expressions, gestures that come from my class, my family, my culture – all traditional, all inherited – nothing individual or unique. I'm some kind of traffic cop between my impersonal insides and my impersonal outsides. Does personality consist of nothing more than standing in the middle of the road determining when to indicate 'Stop' and when to motion 'Go' as far as the impersonal traffic is concerned?

What Jeffrey respects about the bourgeoisie is the sense of responsibility; and what attracts him to me is how bourgeois I am. But I'm not responsible for being bourgeois. I'm not responsible for anything about myself. I'm just an automaton of some sort. I wonder – how responsible am I for longing to overcome being bourgeois? How much of the desire to be different is 'mine' and how much is just one more aspect of the impersonal conditioning I am exposed to? What the hell is there to *me*? Nothing but a hair-thin line at the meeting point between the impersonal inside and the impersonal outside? I am like one of those Chinese egg games: one egg inside another, smaller and smaller: working inward from the football-size egg down to the inkie-fingernail-size egg. One hollow shape inside of another. One empty form enclosing a still less substantial empty form. A game. A toy to keep a child distracted and amused.

The dance had ended. Jeffrey took her by the shoulder and led her back to their table.

'What are you thinking?' he asked.

'Onions,' she answered. 'I was thinking that I am an onion, that most people are like onions. One layer under another down to the last hollow. No core, no pit, no essence – no Salome under the seventh veil; just empty space.'



Another mask under the next outer mask, one disguise under the next, one form of make-believe under the next, right down to the *nothing* at the centre. Empty. Hollow. But you're different. I think there is a real core inside your apple. With seeds, with fibres, with character. You're a seminal character,' she laughed.

'You mean there are two kinds of people: the onion people and the apple people? Can you add apples and onions?'

'Who knows? I may be the Luther Burbank of the psychological sciences.' Over their drinks, they were staring at each other again. What would it be like, Lavinia wondered, to have his child? What would the result be of crossing his apple character with my onion character? And why isn't he working at it? Why hasn't he picked me up in his arms and carried me into his bedroom? Why hasn't he screwed me to the bed? To the couch? To the floor? What is he waiting for? Does he want me to rape him? I'm so excited now (nice girls don't say 'hot') that I could throw myself into his arms right here.

'Lavinia,' he said softly.

'Yes, yes?' she replied hopefully.

'Do you want a cigarette?'

'No.' She was beginning to feel dour. The floor show started. There was a piano player who tried to imitate Thelonius Monk. Then there was a singer who tried to imitate Lena Horne. Then there was a comedy couple imitating Nichols and May imitating everybody.

'It's late,' Lavinia said, putting the extra match books in her purse. 'Let's go. Shall we?'

Freezing, she sat with her legs crossed in the bucket seat of the sports car. 'Will you come up to my place for a night-cap?' She hoped her voice did not sound pleading.

'I can't. I'd love to, but I can't. We're going to your parents' tomorrow afternoon, and I've got to work tonight on the article. Warden needs it shortened by a page and a half. He's tightening up the whole issue in order to squeeze

in a special on Bourgeois Anonymous. Have I mentioned that already?’

‘No.’ She was listless, and the information did not penetrate. She was being rejected, that was already more than she could grasp. For some reason, Jeffrey Bones was determined not to make love to her. But what was the reason? It couldn’t be that he wanted to wait until he had met her parents. What sense would that make? It certainly wasn’t a case of his losing interest in her. She had verified that time and again while they were dancing. No. It was something more complex, more subtle. Something involved, she felt – as if he had sworn an oath to achieve something. Or as if he was involved in an experiment of some sort. But then why hadn’t he explained it to her? Why didn’t he confide in her?

When they parked near her building, he said: ‘Lavinia, I worship you.’

It wasn’t possible, was it, that he might be one of those sacred-and-profaners she had heard about – you know: who need one kind of woman to idolize but a different kind to pop the cork in.

Point blank, she asked him: ‘You do want to *have* me, don’t you?’

‘Passionately,’ he answered. ‘But at the right time and under the right circumstances.’

She felt as much in the dark as before. But left it at that. He promised to pick her up at noon, and they would have a good stiff drink to strengthen them for the ordeal.

Googie had not yet come in. She was at her guitar lesson and folk-sing-jam-session. Lavinia was alone – and not at all a nice girl. She was hot. Lavinia wanted to make love. But she was in love with a man too good for her. A man on another plane. A man of the future. A man who had reasons of his own. She smoked one cigarette after another. She lit the fire in the fireplace and, by that only light in the room, drank cognac out of a water glass. She wanted to make love.

*But she was in love with input-process-output-storage.* And he was computing some plan of his own, unknown to her. The more she drank, the more she damned well knew that she wanted to make love. She wanted to be naked in some man's arms, muscle against naked muscle, lips against lips. It didn't matter whose. If the man she loved was too good for her – on a pedestal – saintly, with a halo round his brains, well, then, why not call in a stud? Why can't a woman? If *he* were in love with a woman too good for him, a man would say 'Goodnight' to her politely and go call on a call-on. A man would do that. Why shouldn't she? She'd had a chance to be a plaything, now, for a while she'd act like a playboy. Vincent Guarcello. That's the answer. He'd been boasting about his powers for months.

Lavinia put the cognac down and brought her handbag into range of the firelight. There, well-preserved, neatly tucked next to the mirror, was his card, with the phone number written on the back. At all hours. Un-listed. If you want to make love – call in a man. It's the Bourgeois Anonymous thing to do. Uninhibited. Spontaneous. Instinctual. If you're free enough and game enough and gutsy enough. And hot enough. Go ahead.

She dialled the number.

It rang six times before he answered. He snarled, 'Yeah?'

'This is Lavinia. Just checking on your bedtime.'

'Well, it's past. . . .'

It was as clear-cut a rejecting as she'd had in the past hour. 'What is it?' she asked bitchily. '*That* time of the month for *you*?'

'I'm not alone.' His voice sounded vaguely apologetic.

'I won't be for long, either,' she said. 'Sorry I interrupted you.' And hung up.

Humiliated. Ridiculed. Disgusted. Instead of being the big time girl-about town, she was just another girl in the Village who had Vincent Guarcello's unlisted telephone number And called the wrong night. How revolting. And

then – oh, God!, oh, sacred duties; oh, holy missions – she suddenly realized: she hadn't bought her mother's birthday present!

It was only one-thirty. Half the shops in the Village would still be open. She rushed into her warm things. But not Googie's coat; they overpriced things for her if they saw her in that get-up. If she couldn't make love, at least she could get out and *buy* something . . . Reasonable. That would make her feel better.

## Chapter Six

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It snowed furiously during the night and into the next day. Along the drive out of the City, the trees held out bare black arms loaded down with snow. Black pyramid skeletons heavy with whipped cream frostings. White Plains looked virginal. The smooth lawns of summer were all lathered over with gentle snow drifts. Only the sidewalks along some streets were pock-marked with foot prints. Each house seemed surrounded by groups of white dwarfs – the snow-shrouded and bearded shrubbery, standing guard. Inside the slick sports car, the windshield wipers sounded anachronistically like the tic-toc of a grandfather clock. Jeffrey drove slowly and carefully. They spoke little, heavy with the seriousness of the mission and quieted by the presence of all that whiteness.

The house they parked before was a red brick colonial with white shutters and two large oak trees standing symmetrically on the wide lawn shielding its face. It had the look of peace, of well-being, of gentility, and gracefulness. Lavinia said: 'The zoo.'

The wide hallway felt steamy with warmth as they entered. Jeffrey was immediately introduced to the quartet of archetypes. The maternal Grandfather was bald with two moles like pennies on his jaw and steel-rimmed bifocals over slightly bulging eyes. The Brother was Joe College from

the crew cut blond hair down through his blazer to his dirty white bucks. The Father was pot-bellied. His hair a mixture of blond and white, his nose aquiline, his complexion florid. He wore a black pin-stripe business suit and a green silk tie. His white shirt was criss-crossed with white silk lines. His handshake was a flaccid grip. The Mother's hair was auburn without a line of grey. ('Does she or doesn't she? Only her hairdresser knows.') Her complexion dark, her lips moist crimson. Over her heavily-sagging body she wore a neatly draped brown knitted dress with wooden buttons all the way down one side, and heavily heeled practical walking shoes below her thick ankles.

Either the overheated house or her concern for the situation suddenly brought the loveliest pink flush to Lavinia's cheeks. When she turned away from the closet and shook her head to loosen the hair Jeffrey revelled in the sight of her – peaches and cream – slender, handsome, beautifully dressed in blue velvet: flawless and enchanting. He wondered what words of compliment her family would give her. Could they say: 'Isn't she gorgeous' or 'How stunning you look' or just 'What a deep pleasure it gives us to see you.' They were obviously thinking of the right thing to say.

The Mother found it. 'Livy,' she began, 'we're so glad you're safe. The roads the way they are. In this snow. You're more than a half-hour late. We were terribly worried.' She put her arm around Lavinia's waist. 'You're getting thinner, darling,' she stage-whispered. 'I've warned you about not eating well enough.'

'Let's go into the family room,' the Father said. 'Want to have a sherry, Mr Bowen?'

'Yes, I'd like that.'

'Do you drink much, Mr Bowen?' the Mother asked, with a now-now-don't-take-me-seriously smile.

'You'll probably think I do when you see my birthday present for you.'

'*You* brought a present for me?' She looked daggers at her

son. 'How terribly thoughtful of you, Mr Bowen; much more thoughtful than I have any good reason to expect.' She looked a turn-of-the-knife at her son, but he was lighting a cigarette. 'Another one?' she asked him.

'Please call me "Jeffrey". Well, it was very kind of you to have me at your birthday party. Let me get the present. It's with my coat.'

'I'll just bring in some titbits from the kitchen.'

The Father whispered, 'What does he do?'

'I've told you already. He's a mathematician.'

The Brother whispered, 'Where did he go to college?'

'New York and Europe.'

The Brother smiled with comfortable superiority.

The Grandfather whispered, 'Is that his car?'

Jeffrey returned from the hall with the package under his arm. Lavinia stood at the coffee table where her father had set the bottle of sherry and five glasses. The room was light and airy looking. Harmoniously coloured and handsomely proportioned. There were azure walls and a pine-green carpet. The cornices, set like tiaras over the wide windows on three walls, were covered by the same soft white damask that fell to the floor in luxuriant drapes.

Two sofas faced each other before the fieldstone fireplace. There was a New England wing chair and a cushiony armchair. A baby grand piano stood at the far end of the room. Opposite the group about the fireplace, dominating a bay window, and staring into the room was the cyclops television set in highly polished mahogany. The pictures on the walls were watercolour scenes of places in Europe that none of them had ever seen, and over the mantle a large reproduction of Van Gogh's sunflowers.

'What a beautiful home you have,' Jeffrey addressed the Father.

But the group as a whole seemed to respond with difficulty, as though no one ever before had had that thought about their house. The Father made the classic deprecating

acceptance speech. 'We like it,' he said. 'Have a drink. Wets the whistle.'

'Sherry's such a gentlemanly drink,' the Mother said as she came in with a tray full of bowls – peanuts and potato chips, a cream cheese dip and crackers. They all sat down stiffly on the facing sofas; the Mother set the tray on the coffee table between them.

Jeffrey looked at the neat pile of birch logs in the fireplace without a sign of ash beneath the grate. 'Marvellous day for a fire,' he said.

'Too much trouble,' the Mother said, looking sarcastically at her son. 'Now everybody take some. It'll be a while before dinner.'

No one moved toward the food.

Lavinia raised her glass – 'A toast to Mother on her birthday!'

'Yes, of course!' Gramp echoed. 'To our dear girl!'

She held her hands together over her stomach. She didn't drink. Jeffrey began the great refrain: 'Happy birth—day to you. . . .'

'Happy birth—day to you,' they all had to chime in.

'Happy beecerth-day dear Mo—ther!'

'Happy birthday to you.'

The sense of strain was palpable.

'Thank you, darlings,' she said, and then busied herself setting a little white napkin on each lap. She picked up the tray and plied them all again, her captive audience. She whined and wheedled and cajoled each of them into taking something. And as soon as each one had a titbit either in hand or in mouth, she said, 'Now, be sure not to stuff yourselves. There's lots more coming.' She seated herself in the wing chair near the television set – facing the group. 'Now, tell us about yourself, Livy. We haven't seen you in what feels like ages. *What's new?*'

The Brother walked out of the room saying, 'I have to make a phone call.' Lavinia sat tight-lipped and tense.



'I'd like to give you this birthday present,' Jeffrey said.

'Oh, don't think I didn't see it lying there next to you, Mr Bowen. I'm just putting off that pleasure a little while. Savouring it, you might say. What *is it*?'

'Open it!' the Father said.

'What lovely paper. So pretty. Japanese? I think I'll put it aside for . . .' her voice dribbled away as she smoothed it out, folded it and set it on the TV. 'Now, what have we here?' From the oblong box she drew out a bottle of vintage Dom Perignon champagne. The shield-shaped label looked like parchment against the deep bottle-green. The Mother smiled at it gently and then at Jeffrey. '*How very nice*. Thank you. I'll have to keep it for some great occasion.' She tennis-balled her smile now from Lavinia to Jeffrey and back again.

'Awfully *nice*,' the Father said, taking it from her hands, and placing it out of danger on the flat top of the piano.

'Very *nice*,' the Grandfather said. 'I gave your Mother a Mexican change purse,' he addressed Lavinia. 'Handwoven.'

'Your Father gave me a *lovely* cheque. I'll have to go into New York one of these days on a shopping spree. Can you take off an afternoon, Livy, and shop around with me?'

'Well, it seems that I'm the only one here who has not made a delivery.' Lavinia got up. 'I'll get it from my coat.'

The Brother returned to the room looking distressed; it rather crumpled his bland face. 'No answer.'

'I'm sure she'll be home by this evening. Your date with *her* is for the evening, isn't it?'

'Think she's out shovelling snow?' Jeffrey asked.

'She's not the type,' he answered.

'What is it you *do*, Jeffrey?' the Father asked as he sat down again. The Brother had gone to the liquor cabinet near the fireplace and poured himself a Scotch and soda. 'I mean - Livy has told me that you're a mathematician, but what you *do*?'

'Most of my work right now is as a consultant on the use of computers for information processing.'

'We have computers at the main office.' The Father lit his pipe. 'I'm in insurance, you know. They use computers for the actuarial tables. In the main office. I've been out here in White Plains for twenty years. I was their first member of the million dollar sales club here in Westchester. Quite a few since then. But I was the first.'

'That's right,' the Grandfather stated. He had gone to the piano bench to look through the Sunday paper stacked there.

'Have some more titbits,' the Mother said.

Lavinia came back with her present, about the size of a book and wrapped in tissue paper. 'Many happy returns of the day, Mother.' Lavinia kissed her on the cheek.

'All I ask is that my family should be together and that we should enjoy good health.'

'Yes, Mother.'

The Father poked about in the bowl of his pipe; the Brother made his drink a little stronger; the Grandfather found the financial section. Only Jeffrey and Lavinia watched as the Mother wound the white ribbon around one finger, smoothed and folded the tissue paper and placed it on the TV, and then stroked the flat box, saying, 'Don't tell me. Let me guess. Is it a book?'

'No, Mother. Go ahead. Open it.'

'Oh! Gloves. White kid gloves!' She looked inside one. 'But Livy, you *shouldn't* of. You know how many pairs of dressy gloves I *have*!'

Jeffrey caught the expression of pain on Lavinia's face. 'Yes, I know, Mother. But they were on sale,' she lied, 'and such a bargain that I couldn't resist.'

'Oh, were they, darling? Did you buy some for yourself? When you come across a saving like that, you should always pick up a *few* pair. If not for yourself – you can always keep them for a time when you'll have to give someone a present. It's a very sensible thing to do.' She looked at Mr Bowen as she stood up and put her arm around Lavinia's waist again. 'Perhaps you gather that we don't think our little girl is

especially sensible.' She smiled her I-am-an-adoring-and-oh-so-indulgent-mother smile. 'She isn't; she's very sensitive and artistic, but not *terribly* practical. However,' she said, squeezing her daughter's waist, 'I thought I might ask you to help me in the kitchen for a few minutes – that is, if you gentlemen can spare us.'

The three men in her family grunted or nodded their total indifference, and the ladies marched out of the room.

The Brother said 'I'll try that number again.'

The Father said, 'I have to go to the bathroom.'

The Grandfather looked up from the piano bench to realize that he was alone in the room with Mr Bowen. 'Want to see some of the paper?' He brought the whole stack with him to the sofa facing the guest.

'No, thanks. I read it this morning.'

'Mind if I just look through it quickly? I haven't had a chance to see it yet. You know how it is.'

Jeffrey poured himself a Scotch and soda at the liquor cabinet. Looking out of the bay window through the bare birches along the side of the house, he saw that it had stopped snowing.

'It's difficult living with your children,' the Grandfather said suddenly.

'I would suppose so,' Jeffrey agreed, and sat down opposite him again.

'You never know when you're intruding. Never want to ask for too much. Can't do anybody much good. And then you never know how you're going to feel.'

'Do you have many hobbies?'

'I watch television most of the time.'

'Do any of your friends live nearby?'

'One. Old pain in the neck. But he's off on a six week cruise. Virgin Islands and back. Can't begrudge him that – in this weather. But *I* couldn't expect a Christmas present like that.' He leaned forward and confided in a whisper, 'They're not as well off as it looks.' He leaned back again and

pretended to straighten up the stack of papers. 'All sorts of ways of being taken care of in your declining years.'

Jeffrey smiled. 'I remember reading somewhere that Bernard Berenson's companion would warm his watch between her hands before strapping it around his wrist.'

'Not here in White Plains!' the old man snorted.

'What's not here?' the Father asked as he walked in, rubbing together his freshly-washed hands.

'I think I'll use the bathroom now,' the Grandfather said. He passed the Brother coming back to the room, muttering, 'Still no answer, goddam it.' He crossed to the far end of the room, ran through one line of *Redwing* on the piano, and then stared out at the snow-coated lawn with bored, restrained agitation.

'What's not here in White Plains?' the Father repeated.

'We were talking about the ways that old people are cared for in different civilizations. You know, in some prehistoric cave in the Pyrenees, archeologists have found the remains of a very old woman who had been kept alive long after she had lost all of her teeth. Anthropologists figure that the other members of the tribe must have chewed her food for her.'

The Brother said, 'Disgusting.'

'Which means that – if prehistoric man could have found a way of taking good care of their old and disabled – there must be something wrong with our society if we can't even get a bill passed in Congress for minimal health insurance for the aged.'

'You some kind of Red?' the Father demanded.

'Hardly. I just know how tough it can be on poor people. A whole family's savings can be wiped out, sometimes, paying for the old-age sickness of one member.'

'There are private means adequate to covering such circumstances. I'm not in insurance for nothing. I know what I'm talking about. Let the government get involved in this sort of thing, and where will it end? Lower rates on govern-

ment automobile insurance? Government life insurance? Government fire and theft? Is that what you want? Ridiculous!' He pounded the remaining tobacco deeper into the bowl of his pipe with his index finger. 'I don't understand what's happened to the young people of this country. Is there no ambition left? No get-up and gumption? Why do they all want George to do it for them? What's the big deal about having the government take care of everybody?'

Jeffrey said, 'I couldn't agree with you more. It's just that beyond those of us who *can* take care of themselves, there are the problems of those who haven't . . .'

'Well, they've made their beds, now let them . . .'

'Don't talk dirty, Daddy,' the Brother said.

'Ridiculous!'

'What are you getting *aggravated* about, Father?' the Mother asked – sticking her head in through the archway to see if everything was all right.

'Nothing,' he answered contemptuously.

'Just be calm and take it easy,' she smiled, smoothing the 'party-apron' she had tied over her dress. 'Remember: we have company. Livy's beau.' She disappeared.

The Brother said, 'You don't really *care*, Dad. Why pretend? You don't *own* the insurance Company. If you *owned* it, it would be a different matter.'

'What do you think of that kind of talk?' the Father asked Jeffrey.

'The toilet bowl doesn't flush,' Gramp said.

'Call the plumber,' the Father replied.

'It's Sunday.'

'All right! We'll use the one off the kitchen for a day. It won't kill us!'

'I'm sorry.' The Grandfather was intensely apologetic. 'I don't know how it happened. I didn't mean to do it.'

'Don't be ridiculous. Of course. Sit down. Forget it,' the Father snapped. 'Brother, will you get my tobacco from the hall table?'

'What? Did the snowfall paralyze both legs?' The Father went livid with mute rage. 'Don't burst,' the boy said. 'I'll get it.' The Father bit hard on the pipe stem half-way down his throat. 'Only – don't call me "Brother",' his son commanded.

In the kitchen Lavinia helped stack the dishes to be taken into the dining room. The Mother busied about – selecting silverware from drawers. She asked, with overwhelming seriousness, while counting spoons, 'What's *new*, Livy?'

*Please*, don't call me Livy!

'Darling – you ought to forgive an old woman old habits.'

'Now don't try to make me feel sorry for you. You're anything but an old woman.' It was always the same appeal, longing for the same response.

'But I feel it, darling.' She was opening the canned cranberry sauce. 'What with the aggravation we have worrying over you and Brother; worrying about Gramp; and my own health.'

'How about Dad?'

'He takes everything so to heart. You know, all last week when my back and my legs hurt me so – poor Dad took it so much to heart – he was so worried about me – that he seemed to just go about in a daze. You should of seen his face! Drawn! He was so worried, Livy, he ran into another car in a parking lot one day; that's how worried and concerned he was. You know what a careful driver he is. And how beautifully he always keeps the car. You'd never know it's two and a half years old. That's how worried he was about me.' With an audible ache she bent over to baste the turkey. 'I don't mind going to all this trouble to make a wonderful dinner, as long as my whole family is together. It's wonderful to have a family that's close, Livy, let me tell you. What else is there?'

'You mean of importance in life?'

'No. What else do I have to get ready.' She took the bakery

pumpkin pie out of its cardboard box, the potato salad out of the delicatessen container, and the garden salad out of the Horn and Hardart Retail Store plastic jar. Into her half dozen Bohemian cut glass dishes, she emptied the cans of fruit salad appetisers. 'Now, if you'd just fill the water goblets, Livy, I think we're all set.'

When Lavinia returned from setting the dining-room table, her mother asked, 'How does this weather affect you, darling?'

'Goes through me right here—' she stood, arms akimbo, with her hands in the small of her back. 'It's supposed to be terrible for kidneys. I knew a man who was in the Army in Alaska. Lost a kidney in weather like this.'

'Luckily I haven't had any kidney trouble.' She folded the paper containers neatly into the wastepaper-basket, placed the empty cans in the stainless steel garbage bin, and washed out the plastic jar for future reference. 'But I don't see why we go on talking about my problems,' she mused, washing her hands in the sink, 'when there are wonderful new things to talk about.' Conspiratorially she drew Lavinia into the breakfast nook and sat down on the bench opposite her. 'Now tell me about Mr Bowen. He's awfully attractive. So proper looking. I love that grey flannel suit and his shoes look awfully expensive. English, I suppose. Are they from England?'

'I'll have to ask him, Mother.'

'No, don't do that, silly. It embarrasses a man to be asked about clothes. Men don't know anything about clothes. To this day I have to buy all of your father's things. He doesn't know fabrics and he has no colour sense. Why, the decorator who did over the downstairs here said that the colour combinations Dad originally wanted for the family room could have been asked for only by a man who was blind from birth.'

'He has other things on his mind, Mother. Now what would you like to know about Jeffrey?'

'How old is he? What does he do? Have you met his parents? Does he go to church? Where did he go to college? What are his friends like? Does he have any bad habit? Which reminds me – wasn't that *awfully* nice of him to bring me a present? Obviously, he did it on his own, because if he'd of asked you, you'd of told him that I rarely drink. But I'll keep it for an occasion. Or maybe I can give it to someone for a very special present. It was *terribly* nice of him. The more I think of it . . .'

'He's illegitimate.'

'*What?!*'

'His father abandoned his mother, who brought him up by herself.'

'*What?!*'

'He's practically self-educated, lived in Europe for a number of years; is a brilliant mathematician; and is going to have an article in the next issue of *Thought* about the consequences of automation and all that sort of thing.'

'I'll have to read it. Send me a copy, Livy. The poor boy! What a life! Oh, how *sad*.'

'It's not sad at all, Mother. Look at the results. He's a splendid man. Honest. Noble. Loyal. Truthful, and kind. He's Generous. Intelligent. Worldly. Imaginative. Thoughtful. And very-well-off.'

'How well off?'

'Let me give you an example – a few months ago 'e flew over to Switzerland to ski for a couple of weeks.'

The Mother drew herself back and reflected for a moment. 'What is he – a spendthrift?'

'He's single, and he likes to enjoy himself.'

'But that's a little ostentatious, wouldn't you say?'

'No, I wouldn't say.'

'Livy, it's all right to spend money lavishly,' the Mother instructed, 'at the right time and in ways that count; but the most important thing is dependability. Just how dependable would you say he is?'



Lavinia gave a profound sigh of weariness. 'I don't know,' she said. 'He's conscientious concerning what I know of him.'

'But can you depend on him?'

'For what?'

'You know perfectly well what I mean, Lah-vin-ee-ah; don't be coy with me; and don't make it more difficult than it is to talk with you!'

The Brother came into the kitchen. 'What's to eat?'

'I'm just taking the turkey out of the oven.' She looked at the stove clock. 'I've left it in about five minutes too long now.' She looked angrily at her daughter.

The Brother hovered over the steaming bird while the Mother carved it. 'I'll just take this slice . . .'

'I hate people eating before everything's ready. Get a plate. Get a napkin. Don't use your fingers. There's a fork. Do you want some cranberries with it?'

Lavinia stood in the archway of the living room listening to the conversation.

'What's your game?' the Father asked.

'You mean "What am I up to?"'

'No. What's your sport? Do you have a sport?'

'Skiing.'

'Mine's golf. I don't know about skiing. Nobody I know skis. Golf's a terrific game. You can do business while you're having pleasure.' He laughed with genuine satisfaction.

The Grandfather said, 'He shot a hole in one, once. Twelve years ago.'

'Eleven years ago,' his son-in-law corrected. 'Yes, indeed. A hole in one.' He savoured the memory. 'What's there to compare with that in skiing? Getting down a mountain side all in one piece? *Home* in one!!' He roared with laughter.

Lavinia entered saying, 'Have another sherry, Dad.'

'This is my fifth, now, Livy. Come sit by me, Livy.' He patted the cushion next to him. 'Tell me about yourself. What's *new*?'

'What would you like to hear about?' she asked.

He turned back to face Jeffrey, saying, 'That hole in one was at a golf course in Bermuda. We went to Bermuda just off season once eleven years ago. I never played that course before and I never played it but once after. But I had a bona fide verified hole in one. There were two other people who saw it. Neither of them personal friends.'

'They brought back a lot of perfume from that trip to Bermuda,' Gramp said. 'Mother still has some of it, I believe.'

'What's new with *you*, Dad?' Lavinia asked – trying to inject some spark of life into her voice.

'Well, I've been a little under the weather, girl. Business hasn't been too good the past few months. Never is just this time of year. And then—' he looked around the room cautiously. 'As long as Mother isn't here, I'll tell you. Last week was really a bad week. I mean *bad*! I had quite a scare. Gramp knows, but he won't tell Mothe.. Be sure you don't. I don't want her all aggravated over something she can't do anything about.'

'What was it?'

'I had a scare that the Income Tax people might want to go over my returns for the past five years. It was my accountant – you know Jerry Gibbon, don't you? Used to be called FitzGibbon; changed his name – he got me started. Had some kind of notice from the Federal people. Thought I was going to be one of his clients whose books'd get the going over.'

'Well, believe me, I went around in a panic for five days. I've been so nervous, I ran into somebody else's car in the parking lot back of my office one morning. Drove in and just forgot to stop. I was in a daze. Couldn't think of anything else. Lucky that's all over. Jerry was wrong. They're

not going to bother me. Two other guys. What a relief. Believe me. I don't think I could live through it again.'

Jeffrey asked, 'Why were you so scared?'

'Be sure not to tell Mother, Livy. She gets so upset about everything. I don't want her more upset than she is.'

'No, I won't tell her, Dad.' He leaned forward to pour another glass of sherry. Lavinia and Jeffrey caught each other's eyes and, for a split second, commiserated with each other's sorrow. Then Jeffrey winked and Lavinia relaxed into a smile. How much she loved him! she thought. How good he was!

The Father looked around, with the glass raised before him. 'The only thing my doctor will let me take.' He pointed to his heart with his free hand. 'Have to be careful. But sherry's all right, if you take enough of it.'

The Brother bounced into the room, humming a tune. 'Well, I finally got through.' He patted Gramp on the back; pinched Lavinia's cheek; and sat down cockily next to Jeffrey. 'I'm happy to announce that the telephone wires are not *out* in good old Westchester. Connection can be made.'

'You certainly must have got what you wanted,' his sister remarked.

'Hard work, foresight, and forethought had nothing to do with it; just pure luck and the power of prayer. I'll explain it to . . . somebody . . . later.' He was grinning from ear to ear.

'All this just for a date with your girl tonight?' his father asked.

'Oh, it's a helluva lot bigger than that. But now let's talk of other things. Livy,' he said, 'what's new with *you*?'

'I've been trying to tell somebody that. . . .'

'What is it you *do*?' the Brother asked Jeffrey.

'I'm a mathematician. I work with computers.'

'Oh, yes. I hope you'll forgive my prying,' he said without a shred of embarrassment, 'but how much do you make at it?'

'Enough.'

'Well, that's a keep-him-at-a-ten-foot-pole answer. Nothing personal, you understand. I'm interested only because I haven't settled on a career-type-job choice yet. I'm trying to find what different slaveries pay; you understand.'

Jeffrey said, 'You mean you don't know yet what you want to be?'

'Oh, I know what I want to *be*,' the boy answered with a leer. 'I just don't know how I'm going to pay for it.' He grrr-ed like a tiger and then barked little puppy yaps and purred. 'If my daddy-o had bought the right kind of insurance years ago - like buying stock in the company - I wouldn't have to work for a living. But the way things stand, it seems I might actually have to earn my own money.' He sobbed.

Lavinia said, 'Isn't he the cutest toy!'

'What are you majoring in at college?' Jeffrey asked.

'English Lit.' He smiled. 'Something known as Helium, Hot Air or Gas Lit.'

'Well, then maybe you can place these lines for me. They've been running through my mind for the past half hour.' He cleared his throat, and began:

'What gulfs between him and the seraphim!  
Slave of the wheel of labour, what to him  
Are Plato and the swing of Pleiades?  
Is this the Thing the Lord God made and gave  
To have dominion over sea and land;  
To trace the stars and search the heavens for power;  
To feel the passion of Eternity?'

'I think it's Shakespeare,' the young man answered. 'Yeah; I'm pretty sure it's Shakespeare. From one of the tragedies. Sounds like it.'

Lavinia looked at Jeffrey with adoration. 'You've memorized poetry.'

'Out here in White Plains,' her brother explained, 'they don't make you do that after grammar school.'

'It's a loss, I'm sure,' the Grandfather judged.

The Mother stood at the entrance, smoothing down her filmy party apron. 'All right, everyone. The board is groaning, as they say. Come along. Come along – one and all!'

The furniture in the dining-room was highly polished rosewood. There was a crystal tear-drop chandelier in the centre above the table. The table centrepiece was made of golf balls imbedded in the spongy green stuff that florists spike flowers into. In between the golf balls were pinned artificial violets. Around the room, a fox hunting scene ran along the wallpaper. Jeffrey could feel the soft deep rug through the soles of his shoes. 'You all know your regular places, but Mr Bowen. I mean: Jeffrey. You sit here on my right.' They were each seated at a neat, doiled placemat, with fine bone china and heavy silver, each with a neat little flowered ash tray, and individual salt and pepper shakers, silver with cobalt blue linings. 'Shall we say grace?'

The Brother gazed up to the chandelier and prayed: 'Princess Grace!'

'You wag, you,' Lavinia said snidely. 'You wag.'

'Tailing my dog?' He laughed. His happy spirits were not to be dampened by having to be at his mother's birthday party.

After the fruit cup, Lavinia and the Mother removed the dishes to the buffet and served the turkey from a silver platter. It was dry. The potato salad was dry. The garden salad was wet. The cranberry sauce was too wet. The stuffing was essentially bread. And there were Parker House rolls, besides. The gravy was hot.

'How *can* you smoke between bites?' the Mother asked her son.

'By placing the filtered tip between my lips,' he said, 'and inhaling.'

'It ruins the taste of the food. I went to *some* trouble to make one of your favourite meals. . . .'

'It is very *nice*,' the Grandfather said.

'Awfully *nice*,' the Father said.

'*Terribly* nice,' Lavinia said.

'Thank you, darlings. Thank you very much.' She looked at Jeffrey. He was just then cracking a piece of the bird's cardboard-crisp skin between his teeth. 'Very tasty,' he smiled. 'There's nothing like a home cooked meal.'

'Take more, Jeffrey. Don't be bashful.' That was one of the Mother's stock expressions. It was the only one certain to be heard at the dinner table with a guest, no matter whether he was six or seventy-five years old. Lavinia winced. But in all her years, this was the first time she ever heard a guest, looking her mother straight in the eyes, say, 'I'm not bashful. I simply don't want any more. Thank you.'

Undaunted, the Mother replied, 'I know how young people are in a strange house. It isn't as though I never go out.' She heaped more potato salad and slices of turkey on the piles that Jeffrey had left. 'In weather like this you just have to forget about a diet or worries over company manners. As a matter of fact we go out quite a good deal. Livy - we had dinner at the Morrisons' only last month.'

That drew a blank.

'You remember the Morrisons. You used to play with their little girl, Sandra. Pretty thing. Long braids.'

'That feels about fifty years ago.'

'Seems like only yesterday to me. Sandra's all grown up. Has three children. Lives in Kentucky, I think now,' said. Married some kind of geologist, poor thing. Did poor. Won't take any help from his parents, I understand. Strange. But she always was a strange girl. I remember the time . . .'

'What time is it?' the Brother said.

'You have a watch,' his father replied.

The Grandfather said, 'It's four o'clock.'

'My date's at seven.'

'What are you planning to do?' the Mother asked.

'Well,' her son began coyly, 'if the Daddy Rabbit will let the College Rabbit borrow the Rabbit chariot, I'll drive

over to pick up the Pink Bunny Rabbit and drive her to a movie. 'Then we'll go straight to a neighbourhood druggie store for an ice cream soda with two straws,' he winked at Lavinia, 'and I'll take her to her front door, try to kiss her good night, get my face slapped, and drive right home – crying all the way.'

'Thank you for the information,' his father said. 'Pass the cranberry sauce.'

'Aunt Mildred was asking about you, Lavinia. She's always been very fond of you, Livy; very fond. You ought to drop her a note now and then. She always asks about you. Uncle Harold isn't feeling very well. They were down in Florida again this fall as usual; but the poor man had a hernia attack there and they flew back.'

'Terrible thing.' Gramp shook his head sadly.

'There are some things that money can't help you with. With all their money – they never had children; and now Uncle Harold isn't in the best of health. Pass me the garden salad, please, Brother. Isn't it nice?' the Mother asked everyone. 'I didn't discover it myself. As a matter of fact it was Mrs Morrison who told me about it. She served it the night we were there. What a lovely home they have! With a *bee-you-tee-ful* glass-enclosed sun porch for winter – a regular greenhouse, full of plants. But I don't know how they stand three cats. Imagine! *Three* of the things. All Persian. I could never do it. She isn't the world's best housekeeper, let me tell you; the mess in that den! – but she does have a pleasant manner. Wouldn't you say Ella Morrison has a pleasant manner, Father?'

'What?'

'In fact, *he* has a pleasant manner, too. Henry Morrison.'

'Oh.' The Father came into focus. 'You're talking about the Morrisons. I thought you were talking about Harold and Mildred.'

'Cranberry sauce isn't what it used to be,' the Grandfather said. 'It's all strained nowadays.'

'Nothing's the way it used to be,' Joe College said. 'And it never was!'

'I don't know why you have to be so cynical,' his mother said. 'What do *you* have to be cynical about? You've always had everything handed to you on a silver platter.'

'Literally,' Jeffrey said.

'That's pretty cute,' the young man replied. 'I might even find it difficult to believe you're a mathematician. Never met a mathematician before. Except my high school algebra teacher. And he was a fag.'

'Brother!' his mother shouted, dropping her knife. 'I never want to hear talk like that from you again!' She was outraged, scandalized. 'In your own home!'

'Ridiculous!' his father said.

'What did he say?' Gramp asked.

'Never mind. Now let me see who wants anything more. I have more of everything in the kitchen. But, of course there's dessert and coffee – or tea if you'd prefer, Livy? Oh, I beg your pardon. Jeffrey? No? Are you sure? Now, don't be bashful. If you want more of anything just speak up. No? Gramp? Father? . . . Brother – I think *you've* had quite enough. Livy, will you help me with the dishes.'

The four men sat in silence about the disordered table.

Gramp asked, in general, 'Who do you think'll win the World Series this year?'

The Brother said, 'Russia.'

'I don't think that's funny,' the Father said.

'I thought he asked "Who'll win the world this year".'

'That makes matters worse. Will you get me my tobacco, bro—. Howard.'

'Certainly, Father.'

Silence in the dining room. The Father said, 'I don't know what will become of that boy.'

'What does he like?' Jeffrey asked. 'What is he interested in?'

'He likes to drive my car.'



The Brother returned with the humidor. Lavinia held back the kitchen door as her mother slowly carried in the pumpkin pie all lathered over with whipped cream in the centre of which stood one tiny, pink, lighted, birthday candle.

Only Gramp said, 'Happy birthday again, dear girl.'

'Thank you!' She looked at one and all with the sincerity of mutual appreciation.

'Make a wish. Blow it out,' her husband ordered.

'Just one candle?' the Brother asked.

'Well, you know I stopped counting a long time ago,' she smiled kittenishly.

'Blow it out!' her husband commanded.

'I have to make a wish first.' She closed her eyes. 'But you all know what I wish for.'

Lavinia and her brother said in chorus: 'All I ask is that my family should be together and that we should all enjoy good health!' – and burst out laughing.

'Well, you can make fun of me if you like.' She was deeply offended. 'I may sound like a silly old woman to you smart alecks. But here – at my birthday – and in front of company . . .' Tears came to her eyes. She turned three quarters away from the table. Lavinia put her arm around the woman's fleshy shoulders.

'Don't be angry, Mother. It's just that we've heard you say it so many times; it's true: we knew it by heart.'

She dried her eyes on the hem of the party apron. 'It isn't as though I don't wish everyone well. I'm not thinking of myself. What I want is for the good of the family. How you can find that something to make fun of – I'll never understand.'

'Let's have the pie!' her husband demanded.

Lavinia helped her mother, who insisted on washing up and putting away all of the dishes immediately after the dinner was over. The Brother spent the time in the downstairs bathroom. Alone again in the living room with the Father

and Gramp, Jeffrey tried to begin a conversation by saying, 'I'd like to take this opportunity to tell you what a splendid person I think your daughter is.' The Father stared at him wonderingly and sucked at his pipe. The Grandfather belched. 'Excuse me.'

'She has such charm, such character, such vivacity!'

The Father continued to look at him and nod his head affirmatively.

'She's a beautiful woman! Don't you agree?'

The Father exchanged a glance with Gramp before he said, 'Did she tell you she was married before?'

'Yes.'

'Well, as long as everything is in the clear . . .' he left the thought incomplete and sat down next to the newspapers. Fingering through the first section, he read with quiet amusement: 'Korea . . . Vietnam . . . Cape Canaveral . . . De Gaulle . . . the Congo . . . Health, Education, and Welfare . . . Say, *there's a beautiful car!*' Looking up, he asked Jeffrey, 'Have you seen a picture of the new Bentley?'

'What kind of car do you have?'

'Cadillac. Fleetwood. But it's getting on. I've had it almost three years now.' He stared worshipfully at the photograph in the full-page advertisement. 'Real class.'

The Mother came into the room with a dish of candies in one hand and a group of freshly washed ash trays in the other. After placing them about the room – on the coffee table, the television set, the end tables – she drew the white damask drapes across each of the windows, blocking out the whole scene that could be viewed from the light and airy room. 'This'll make it comfy,' she said. The party apron was gone and she had washed up and put on fresh toilet water.

Immediately behind Lavinia, the Brother came into the room, asking, 'What's on television tonight?'

The Grandfather brightened up. 'At six there's that wonderful travelogue "See This World First". Tonight it's

about Hawaii. That's on Channel Four. On Channel Seven is an old Jean Harlow movie. On Channel Two is the Smithsonian Institute introduction to photosynthesis - whatever that is.'

'My! You know them all by heart, Gramp,' the Mother said admiringly. Her father was flattered.

'Of course,' he said, 'later there'll be Ed Sullivan.'

The Brother made a lunge for the set. 'Let's see the one about Hawaii. It's after six already.' He looked at his watch. 'Goddam it; we've missed ten minutes!'

'I don't want you to use such language, How - ward! I do wish you'd listen to me once in a while. There are still a few things about how to get along in this world that I can teach you. Not swearing is one of them!'

The picture came in strong and clear.

'It's not a colour set,' the Grandfather apologized.

On the sofa to the left of the fireplace the Brother sat closest to the TV set, his mother next to him, her father beyond her. Opposite them, the Father came first; Lavinia sat between him and Jeffrey. In a herringbone design, they all stared at the black and white travelogue. Lavinia whispered to Jeffrey, 'We can leave in about an hour.' He brought one arm around her back and patted her shoulder. She held his other hand in hers, and squeezed it twice.

'This is a Panoila,' the voice in the box said, 'a Hawaiian cowboy. His herd of Herefords are grazing on the Island of Maui. See the purple mountains in the background. After a swim at the Kaanapali' - view of the beach - 'you can drive up here to Kula for the terrific view' - view of the view. 'This is Ulu Mau, a living village of old Hawaii. Come see the women weaving *lauhala*, pound *tapa*, and make feather  *leis*, grass houses, quilts, and *poi*.'

'What are those wavy lines?' the Mother said.

There was an almost imperceptible tremor in the set.

'Those goddam repair men,' the Father said. 'Paid them thirty-five dollars for a half hour's work only a week ago

Saturday – and look what you get!’ The nervous shiver up the screen was gone in about twelve seconds.

‘I think we ought to get a new set,’ the Mother said. ‘This one is four years old.’

‘I haven’t wanted to mention it before,’ Gramp began, ‘but I think the R.C.A. Victor colour set would be a wonderful buy.’

‘Maybe.’ The Father poked away at his pipe with a naked finger.

‘Kona, on the Island of Hawaii itself, was the home of Kings. Hulihee Palace will charm you with its quaintness’ – view of the Palace – ‘You don’t have to be a good swimmer to see pretty reef fish close to the shore here at Poipu on the Island of Kauai’ – view of gorgeous sex-pot holding white glob at midriff level – ‘The people of Hawaii are happy and friendly’ – view of laughing Natives; sexy beach boys; pineapples – ‘The living is easy . . .’ view of mountainside estate, glass and cedar wood, palatial palace, servants, swimming pool.

‘That’s where you should of settled, Dad!’ The Brother looked at his father accusingly. ‘White Plains!’ he said with unmitigated contempt.

‘You want to go settle in Hawaii? Go! I wish you a lot of luck. What’ll you do to earn a living?’

‘We’re thinking of putting a swimming pool in the back yard,’ the Mother told Jeffrey.

‘Oh, for God’s sake!’ her husband said.

‘Well, we did talk about it once.’

‘Ten years ago!’

‘Howard, your cigarette smoke is blowing right in my face.’

‘Do you realize how much it costs,’ the Father asked with awe, ‘to produce a TV programme like this? A fortune!’

‘Performing with famous guest artists, the Honolulu Symphony invites you to an evening of unique enjoyment’ – view of concert hall; background of Beethoven’s Fifth.

'Why "unique"?' Lavinia asked. Jeffrey laughed.

'Goddam it? The picture's flipping now? Brother, see what you can do, will you?' His son glowered at him, but got up with a sigh.

'Nothing is as fragrant as the Hawaiian *leis*. With *pikaka* or ginger about your neck and shoulders, you'll dance away the night under the stars' – view of dancers flipping backward and forward.

'You're making it worse!'

The Mother asked, 'Do you smell something burning? Has everyone had some candy? Take some! They're delicious. Blums. We had them first last summer at the McGuires' in Tarrytown. Have you ever been to Tarrytown, Jeffrey? It's so lovely. No? That's the way it is. Our young people go off to see all of Europe or the Far East and they don't even know about *bee-you-tee-ful* locations like Sleepy Hollow right here in their own front yard.' She took two more of the candies herself. 'I love them.'

'The paradise that Hawaii presents . . .'

Jeffrey gazed about the room – taking in the quiet and the dignity of objects shined and polished and dusted and kept in utmost neatness and elegance.

The Mother screamed: 'The television's on fire!'

Everyone stood up. The Brother snapped on the floor lamp behind the wing chair. It flooded the top of the TV with light.

'I knew it!' the Mother hollered. 'Look at that! *My God*, Howard, how stupid can you be? You didn't put your cigarette in the ash tray. You missed it completely. It's been lying there burning away at the mahogany finish, while we've been sitting here, eating away!'

The Brother scooped up the short gray worm of ash with an open match book. The wound beneath was superficial, a charred, gauged sore in the polished wood.

'Don't get so aggravated,' Gramp said.

The Father said, 'Goddam it to hell!'

The Brother said, 'I'm sorry.'

'A lot of good that will do.' Then, the Mother ordered: 'Father, go down to the basement and bring me the turpentine. Livy, get me some soap and water – in a little bowl – and a clean rag from under the sink. I'll get the chamois and the furniture polish. Gramp, where's the plastic wood? You were the last one to use it.' She was gone and back in a flash. 'I've told you not to smoke so much! I hope this is a lesson to you! Do you know what a television set like this costs? Do you have any idea? If I've told you once, I've had to tell you a million times – smoking cigarettes is playing with fire! You can't be too careful. It's a dirty habit. Where are the other things I need!' she demanded just as Lavinia and the two men returned to the room.

'Look,' the Brother began, 'it's getting late. My date's going to be waiting. Dad, will you give me the car keys?'

'I ought to give you a smack in the face. Here. Take the keys. See if you can drive more carefully than you smoke. And don't drink. You know what the insurance on this car costs?'

'I can get it for you wholesale . . .' the boy said.

'Stop being such a wise-guy,' Lavinia said.

He came back in an instant with his coat and cap on. 'Goodnight, everyone.' With the exception of his sister and Jeffrey, all were hovered over the television watching the Mother operate on the sacred flesh. They grunted.

'Won't you see me to the car?'

Lavinia and Jeffrey followed him through the kitchen to the garage door. 'Why do you bait them all so?' his sister asked. 'You know it's hopeless.'

'Oh, what the hell. They'll never change. But I'd die of boredom if I didn't. Besides, I'm in a good mood now. You want to know what I found out? I'm not going to be a daddy in seven and a half months!'

'You mean . . .'

'Guessed it the first time! I thought Nancy was knocked

up. Holy Christ, what a relief when I finally got her on the phone and she said "Not this time". Man! I might have had to marry her. Can you imagine? Me - married! Tomorrow! 'Nancy Blake?'

'The one and only.'

'What is she - eighteen?'

'She's nubile, honey. That's all that counts! It was nice meeting you, Jeffrey. Hope I see you again.' They shook hands. The Brother pulled on his fur gloves and then gave his sister a bear hug. 'Lots of laughs!' he said - as a parting blessing.

Gloom had descended upon the living room. The Mother still stood over the victim, but the two men had lost hope. 'What made you think you knew how to fix it?' the Father asked.

'I thought I remembered what Mary Loo Walters did the night we were over there and Andy Cummings left his cigarette on the side of the piano when he sat down to play.'

'Well, I think you've made it worse.'

Gramp said, 'There ought to be furniture restorers who can . . .'

'It'll cost more than a new set,' the Father snarled. 'We'll have to get the whole top refinished. All right. All right. Forget about it. Get that junk out of the family room! Looks like a workshop. Where's my tobacco?'

'Well—' the Mother straightened up her back and covered the spot with the Japanese wrapping paper. Eternal optimism re-emerged like a Lost Atlantis. 'As Jane Ace used to say - "You have to take the bitter with the better".'

'Mother—' Lavinia began. 'Jeffrey and I will have to start getting back to the City.'

'So soon?' she whined.

'It's getting dark. The driving will be difficult.'

'I should think so, in a tiny little car like yours. It's difficult to believe you can both fit into it. I meant to ask you to

show me what the inside looks like. I've never seen the insides of one of those little things. It's such a cute little thing, though. Never do for a *family*, of course; but nice while you're still young and single.'

'Well, let's see them to the door,' the Father said.

'Just a minute! Just a minute,' the Mother insisted. 'I'll just get the things for you in the kitchen. I've wrapped up some of the turkey; put cranberry sauce in a paper cup; the rest of the stuffing; and some of the pie. I'm terribly sorry there's no salad left; I should of kept some aside. You and Googie can have it tomorrow night. You won't have to cook.' She stopped in her tracks just short of the kitchen door and turned to the group behind her in the hallway; saddened, her eyes hectic with sincerity. 'How *is* Googie?' she asked intensely. 'I've been meaning to ask you all day. Here we are, ready to say "Good night", and I haven't even had a chance to say "How's Googie?" What's *new* with her?'

'She's fine, Mother.'

'Good.'

'Get the stuff,' the Father said, 'and let them *go*. Can't you see they're in a hurry to leave?'

As soon as they had their coats on, she was back with a small wicker hamper. 'You can return the picnic basket the next time you come out,' she smiled.

Lavinia said, 'Well, then, we'll have to say goodbye for a while.' She hugged her father, and Gramp, and kissed her mother at the temple.

'It was very kind of you to let me come,' Jeffrey said.

'It was *so* nice to meet you, Mr Bowen.' The Mother's handshake was sticky with plastic wood.

'Terribly nice,' the Father said.

'Awfully nice,' the Grandfather said.

'I just don't know where the time goes to,' the Mother wailed. 'Seems to me you haven't been here fifteen minutes. It is dark out, though. I do hope you're a careful driver,



Jeffrey. We wouldn't want anything to happen to you! Livy, call me tomorrow to say that you got home safely. Call from the office; don't put it on your home phone bill. Warm up the turkey in the gravy. That's the best way. Jeffrey, thank you again – I really don't know how to thank you! – for that wonderful present. We hardly had a chance to talk. There's so much to say. I don't know where the time flies to. But when you're all together with your family and you're having a good time, it just seems that there's barely a chance to say: "*What's new?*" '

## Chapter Seven

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SIDE by side they sat enveloped in separate silences as they drove away. The crust of the snow had turned hard in the crisp air and crackled fresh and firm beneath them as the tyres turned the corner.

Lavinia asked: 'What to him are Plato and the swing of Pleiades?'

'Slave of the wheel of labour,' Jeffrey replied.

'What gulfs between him and the seraphim!'

The street lights cast candlelight yellow on the sparkling fringes of trees and houses. They drove back through the main street onto the highway.

'Okay,' she said, 'let me have it straight and fast: what's your overwhelming impression?'

'How did you ever come out of a family like that?'

'It remains the deepest mystery to me, too.'

They talked slowly, with long pauses for long thoughts.

Jeffrey said, 'When your mother says "We don't want anything to happen to you" – and we imagine she means that she doesn't want anything *bad* to happen – I believe that what she actually means is that she doesn't want *anything* to happen.'

The laugh was a little relief. Lavinia began to breathe more easily. The straitjacket was loosening. Her spirit was beginning to thaw out.

'Of course,' he said, 'it has its advantages.'

'What?'

'They do understand the value of money. You know: "a five cent stamp costs five cents."'

Lavinia said: 'What they understand is the pride of everything and the value of nothing.'

'But they're fundamentally simple. All they want is all that money can buy.'

'Oh, no. They want to be appreciated for their goodness . . . their sacrifice.'

'What did they sacrifice?'

'Other things that money can buy.'

'But what a profound sense of *respect* they have!' Jeffrey said admiringly.

'Have you gone mad?'

'Don't you see what I'm talking about? Not for people, of course, but the way they respect *things*! Material objects. Cups and saucers. TV and vacuumed rugs. Well dusted, well polished, well brushed, well waxed, well oiled, and well swept. The elegant banister in the hallway. The cut crystal and the silverware and the. . . '

' . . . absence of music and flowers and books . . . '

' . . . the handsome clothes and the . . . '

' . . . inability to carry on a conversation or . . . '

' . . . and the attempt to show thoughtful manners . . . '

' . . . of the total *lack* of imagination or of any non-egocentric interest . . . and the constant demand for attention.'

' . . . They're not really so bad.'

'They're hideous.'

'Oh, I don't mean as human beings. They're just failures as far as being human is concerned. But as servants!'

'I beg your pardon!'

'Don't you see? All the qualities I'm talking about. The whole catalogue. What does it apply to? They're everything you'd want in a butler and a maid, a cook (of course, you'd want better cooking), but as man-servants and house-

keepers: with their supreme respect for "possessions" – they make ideal servants.' He was carried away with the idea. 'In fact, that's the essence of their lives! They live like servants in someone else's house. Emptying ash trays and polishing silver until the master and mistress come home. Pretending that it's their home – for the meanwhile. The well-cared-for house – with no one living in it! Serving the house; serving their friends; serving the accountant and the tax men; serving their children – above all! Treating each other like servants and expecting to be treated like a servant.'

'How depressing . . .' Lavinia sucked on a cigarette and slipped lower in her bucket seat.

'All over the land . . .' Jeffrey continued, 'in circular bands around each great city, the zombi area: suburban houses staffed with servants – seeing that the pedigreed dog gets fed and the clean laundry gets put away neatly in linen closets and that every night all the lights get switched off and the gas is checked in the kitchen. But nobody *living* in any of the houses. No one ever coming home. Just the servants and the *possessions* – including the children.'

'All over the world . . .' Lavinia carried on the refrain. 'No escape . . . The quicksand spreads out toward the upper class in one direction and toward the lower class in the other. It gets the lower class first. They're the worst victims of bourgeois mediocrity. They start out buying imitation Swedish modern furniture and end up having birth announcements *engraved*. The whole world sinking into everybody-else-ness . . .'

'No. It isn't quite that bad. Middle class manners do sink to the lower class, but then – that's not all there is to the picture. It's a question of relative proportion. You think of the bourgeoisie as the great granite land mass with a fringe of swank resort beaches and some shanty towns around the edges.'

'That's certainly the case in this country.'

'But not in the world as a whole. This may be the land of

the free-floating middle-man; but it's the reverse in the rest of the world. The middle class is an island of safety in shark infested waters. With an aristocratic castle high on a hill; but *just an island* in an ocean full of poor fish trying to pull themselves onto dry land. That's what it looks like in the big picture.'

'That may be true, but it's no consolation. Like – when I was a child and didn't want to eat something – being told that children were starving in China. It just isn't relevant.'

'You're right.' They drove on in silence for a while along the Hudson, watching the lights strung in great inverted arches along the George Washington Bridge. The stars seemed smaller in the cold night air.

At length, Lavinia said, confidently, 'Well, I expect this cold shower has dampened some of your enthusiasm for becoming properly middle class.'

'Not in the least.'

'You amaze me, Mr Bones! How is it possible?'

'I just don't take them seriously. *They're* not enough different from the lower class. The bourgeoisie I'm going to model myself on is the European version – the real thing. The *anständige Mensch*. The property holder. The professional. Solid. Sterling. Frank. Understanding the forms and enjoying them; not just "acting it out" unconsciously and trapped into servitude to things.'

'You're just talking about something in a dream-world,' Lavinia said.

'God! I'll never forget your mother's face at that moment when she discovered a little burn on the TV set. You'd have thought she'd just been told by Calvin himself that she was among those excluded from salvation for eternity!'

Lavinia sat sulkily silent.

'No need for me to introduce you to *my* mother,' Jeffrey said. 'The pattern's the same. Just on a lower economic level. She has the same obliviousness to her surroundings – thinking only of what she doesn't have. For her, it isn't a

swimming pool. It's a wool coat with fur on the collar and cuffs.

'She doesn't play golf. But she has her own glorious experience of competitive sport. During the Second World War, she worked in a defence plant on some production line, where she used an oil squirt gun. All the other women on the line played a sort of game: trying to squirt each other and especially a newcomer (all women). There were two objects to the game: get 'em in the eye, and don't get caught. If you hit the mark you usually got detected; if you got away with it, you probably didn't hit the eye. But once, my mother squirted the foreman himself – got him smack in the eyeball – and he never found out that it was she who did it! Imagine . . . She tells the story to this day just the way your father tells about his verified bona fide hole-in-one in Bermuda.

'And instead of a silver service or cut crystal she pants for new chintz covers on the furniture for summer. Envious. Jealous. Scared that the tax people or her boss or a friend will find out what *she* cheats on.' He looked at his companion huddled next to him in the car. 'You know these people aren't content unless there's something they're discontent about.'

'Is that your aphorism for the evening?'

'It's just that I'm aiming for a time when I can be content with what I am and what I have – not with the need to become something else or own something different.'

'That's the enemy!' Lavinia said with animation. 'That's what the pamphlet I read you was all about. If you stop *striving*, and if you stick to this line of thought, you'll end up with a repetition-syndrome-neurosis expanded to your entire life.'

'No. I just want to be all of one piece – integrated, as my analyst says. I want a life I'm content with, that's *consistent*.'

'Bugaboo is the consistency of small minds.'

Jeffrey thought about that for a minute – and then laughed.

'Well, maybe I have a small mind. But, then – maybe it's big enough. Big enough to entertain the idea of joining all the advantages of being bourgeois with whatever virtues there are in my kind of loose-knit, make-shift, do-it-yourself-ness.'

'All *what* advantages?'

'The kind of decency that begins with respect for proper forms of behaviour and responsibility to your job or profession and extends to other people – out of contentment and satisfaction, not out of envy and jealousy. The kind of solidity that makes for good things enduring.'

'Like the family you saw this afternoon? Dream-world! Why – the centrifugal force could be touched in the air of every room. That family is just bursting to fly apart. To splinter. To shatter. To be scattered to the four winds . . . to coin a cliché.'

'So what holds it together?'

'Beats me.'

'Two things: love and money. The money part is simple to understand. Do you still take money from your parents?'

'Sometimes. Gifts.'

'Substantial ones, huh . . .' he nudged her, knowingly.

'I admit . . .'

'What about Gramp? And, above all: your brother?'

'Certainly.'

'Why "certainly"? Neither one is a total incompetent or cripple. But the Grandfather is invited to take life easy before he absolutely has to. And the Brother is invited to take it easy before really plunging into life – right? Why do you think he still acts out his adolescent revolt? Because he's financially dependent on them. He's ashamed; and this is his way of getting even. Why do your parents put up with it – even like it? Because it continues to give them a sense of being useful, important, powerful, and worthy of love.'

'A society that doesn't have any initiation rites for determining when a boy becomes a man – so that the

adolescent revolt goes on into the boy's thirties . . .' Lavinia left the thought dangling.

Jeffrey explained. 'They have a perfectly clear-cut initiation rite – like the Eskimo boy's becoming a man when he brings home the first seal he's caught all by himself. Well, for them – the bourgeois boy becomes a man for his family when he earns more money per year than his father does.'

'Finally, and at last! Don't you think that's a bit late? In the meanwhile he isn't a man for anybody else either. Just a Mama's boy or a Papa's boy – so he has time to go through at least his first marriage and a half.'

'That's where the love comes in. He *hesitates* to pass his initiation and be a man in his father's eyes because he's been made to feel that his first and foremost responsibility is to his parents, not to himself. He's made to believe that loving them . . . at least, what they think is love, namely: obedience . . . is more important than being his own man. But Freud explains it all.'

'Really? I meant to ask whether your analyst is a Freudian or what-not.'

'He's a what-not. That's because each of them is trying to establish his own school and get disciples of his own. But that's all right – since it's an art and not a science.'

'What were you going to say Freud explains?'

'Why families like yours stick together instead of flying apart. Why you feel a sense of responsibility to them at the same time that you have so much contempt for what they represent you'd join Bourgeois Anonymous to get over their influence.'

'Yes. Yes. Explain it, Sigmund!'

'Ambivalence. It's the best idea Freud had. And the one absolutely original thought to enter psychology in the twentieth century. Do you realize that for two thousand years no one had been able to account for the fact that you can love and hate the same person simultaneously. But with the introduction of the idea of the unconscious it's easy to



understand what it means to be *of two minds* at the same time.'

'Oh, is that all . . .' she was disappointed.

'All? Why, it's a gigantic thought! Think about it! Realize that you've been so brow-beaten into forced respect for what your parents are supposed to be that – unconsciously – you have to have their approval or you can't think of yourself as "good" or lovable. On the other hand, consciously, you know they have no respect for you and so you do everything you can to find good reasons for having no respect for them.'

'And why do they have no respect for me?' she asked angrily.

'Because you still take money from them.'

'But that business about earning more than Daddy referred to the initiation rite for boys.'

'It's the same for girls. Only they're supposed to marry it instead of earning it.'

'Too much,' she sighed. 'And worse still – if it's all true . . . how *can* you want to become bourgeois?'

'Well, what I want isn't the middle class of money; it's the middle class of "Make the world better or more beautiful for your being in it".'

'Is that a line of poetry?'

'I don't know. It's my analyst's credo. He has it painted on the wall over his couch.'

'Jeffrey – all you really want is to live a decent life. Why do you think of it in terms of becoming bourgeois?'

'Because that's what looks most sensible and desirable to me.'

'It only *looks* that way. When you see it from the inside, though, you know that it's all phony, hypocritical. It's a failure. Do you want to become a servant like my parents?'

'In a way! I want to fulfil all the bourgeois forms – but not lose my own soul. The forms are fine. There has to be a

set of rules and ideals. It's just that they're terribly difficult to live up to. The difference between your parents and me is that I know about ambivalence and they don't.'

'What's the virtue in that?'

'I can be just as ambivalent about the bourgeoisie from the inside as I can from the outside.'

'God! And you talk of living a life all of one piece, integrated.'

'But the bourgeoisie is what offers me my best chance of integrating in this society. It's the knighthood of our time and place. All the noble values I respect are embodied in it. Holy Grail. Hierarchy. Round Table. Coats of Mail. The whole bit.'

'Are you out of your ever-loving mind? That's make-believe. Illusion. Dream world. Masquerade.'

'Masquerade! You've got it, now, girl. Everything depends on which masked ball you want to attend.'

'Even for people like my parents?'

'Sure. For everybody. The only difference is that they don't know they're part of a Mardi Gras. They don't know they're wearing masks. That's what it means to live unconsciously; to "act it out". At least, that's what my analyst says.'

'Will I have to meet your analyst someday instead of your mother?'

'If you think it necessary. . . .'

There was a long silence. They drove off the West Side Highway along the dark streets that led into the Village.

Lavinia smiled to herself. 'I'm bored,' she said.

'I'm ignored,' he said.

They smiled at each other and held hands. The mermaid and the space man.

'Will you marry me?'

She withdrew her hand and rested her suddenly-warm face against it.

'Can't you see,' he began, 'that everything I've been saying

was part of trying to build up enough courage to ask you to marry me?’

With difficulty, Lavinia said, ‘Why does it take so much courage?’

‘I know I’m not good enough for you.’ (She grunted disagreement.) ‘I’m sort of free-and-easy and without real roots. But you’re everything I’ve ever wanted. I’ve been in love with you all of my life; only now I’ve finally found you. It would be difficult. We come out of different worlds. You have “built in” the whole range of values that I’m just trying to cultivate. Maybe your roots will be enough for both of us.’

‘But we haven’t even made love yet!’ Lavinia reminded him. ‘Why decide to marry first?’

‘That’s where the courage comes in. I wanted this to be my first genuinely bourgeois act!’

They parked in Sheridan Square, close to her front door, but Lavinia did not invite him to come up. They sat side by side, both of them looking into the little triangle of park straight ahead of them.

Lavinia was going to let herself go. Much as she had longed for this moment when he might – would he ever? – say he wanted to have her for his wife, now that it was in hand, she realized that she was going to hold nothing back. She wasn’t “playing him” for whatever it might be worth; she was going to be perfectly honest to her feelings of the moment.

‘I had hoped that you and I might have something different together. Because you are so independent of the conventional and mediocre. I thought that you might be able to help pull me out of it. But I suppose that’s unfair to you. I suppose that’s why I thought of you as being too good for me; so I wouldn’t be too disappointed when you went off without me.’

She turned to look at him. ‘I love you, Jeffrey! It isn’t that I don’t. You must understand that. But you bring out

something terribly hopeful in me. At this very moment I'm saying things I hadn't thought of in advance. I'm able to say them because you make me feel free-and-easy, as you put it. I'm comfortable with you. I respect you. And you make me respect myself more. But if we were married – how long do you think *that* would last?

Jeffrey looked at her with surprise. 'I thought marriage was instituted in order to help make it last.'

'Not any marriage I know of.' She sighed; she looked soulfully into his soulful eyes and said, 'I think that if we didn't marry, but had an affair instead, that might be a lot more satisfying.' She sighed again and added, 'As real relationships go, I mean . . .'

At length, he said, 'We don't have to decide it on a moment's notice, of course.'

'No. You're right. Let's take a little breather. This is too sudden. You'll have to let me think it over.' As she watched the smile curve the line of his lips up toward one cheek, she realized that the tone, the words, the manner, the thought of what she had just said was the ideally bourgeois expression Jeffrey must have hoped she would make. And immediately she realized that it gave her pleasure to give him such pleasure so easily. She smiled back in response. 'Let's take "a break". Let's not see each other for – say – a week. How's that?'

'Okay. If that's how you want it. . . .' He was obviously struggling with himself to squeeze out this bourgeois phrase. He's going to have to examine this one with his analyst, she thought.

'Yes. A week will be fine – as a start.' Was she overplaying her hand?

'A start of what? Our *courtting*?'

'How old-fashioned; yes, I suppose; in a way. You see – up to now I've been thinking of you as different. As a non-marrying incast. I'm going to need some time to start thinking of you as a potential bourgeois husband.'

‘All right.’

My God! Lavinia thought; he actually looks as if he’s enjoying this.

‘Until next Sunday, then.’ She kissed him goodnight, partly on the lips, and added, as she got out of the car, ‘We’ll go to the Bourgeois Anonymous meeting.’

## Chapter Eight

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It seemed that an interminably long time had passed between the first gong and the second. While Lavinia sat waiting for the sound to reverberate through the assembly room, announcing the beginning of the cell meeting, she reflected on the extraordinary course of events of the two weeks that had gone by since her first attendance there. So many changes – so that here she sat now, not the initiate next to Googie, but a ‘regular’ with her own neophyte, Jeffrey Bowen, next to her: black-gowned and green-hooded in the strangely greenish light. The metal bridge chairs were filling up; the two figures at the doorway were placing the pointed hoods over the lowered heads. Though draped in black with a green eye-slit hood, an unmistakably female shape was straightening up the line of chairs along the far aisle – like a permanent secretary at a Garden Club meeting.

The past week was most vividly in her mind. The week at the office was standard. On Monday, the semi-annual rumour came around about Betty Wheelwright taking the veil and entering a convent; a French convent, of course. But she was still there, as usual, on Friday. The office boy thought he had sciatica on Tuesday, was afraid that he would have to be operated on for bursitis of the left shoulder on Wednesday; he stayed out the last two days of the week. There had

been only one annoyance. On Monday afternoon, Vincent Guarcello came by with a snide remark about 'Greetings to the blond Chinese.' She had responded simply by saying, 'We all make mistakes.'

'I have a secret,' Vincent said, cute as a four year old. 'Want to know?' And she said 'No.'

The remarkable thing was that she felt no pain. No shame. No guilt. She saw him; she realized that he meant to pull her leg or make her feel that she was 'in his power' – but it would have been the power of blackmail – and she calmly calculated that there was no one she would be ashamed to have know that, once, in the heat of winter, at one o'clock in the morning she had telephoned a self-advertised stud-pony and found out that he had a ride for the night. That was the first experience of the week to make her feel she was benefiting from Bourgeois Anonymous. She had acted impulsively and irrationally in defiance of a middle-class sexual taboo, and it didn't shame her to face it or even to face the possibility of others throwing it in her face. She didn't give a damn. That was a sign of growing up – growing away from the values of home. She wasn't even acutely displeased. Just aware that something odd had happened and that in certain circles she would be made to feel two inches high for doing it. However, right now, as far as her Best Self was concerned, she was satisfied that, having been a victim of certain social mores that she didn't agree with anyhow, she wasn't as much of a victim any more.

How she would have felt if it had turned out differently when she'd telephoned him was a question she didn't ask. One step at a time is enough.

And then there were all the presents from Mr Bones. On Monday he sent a dozen white roses; on Tuesday a twenty-ounce bottle of Joy; then a new album of Brahms' *lieder* recordings; and the next day a package of the ten novels by John P. Marquand. He was obviously adoring the role of a-courtir'. She struggled to keep from telephoning him. But

he called every evening at eight and they talked for a half-hour, exchanging sweet nothings, a-cooing and a-running up the bill. Friday he sent a Golden Apple from Tiffany's with a note about her being worth all the treasures of Troy (signed 'Paris'), and on Saturday he sent her a champagne-coloured negligée (on approval) from Bergdorf Goodman's. It *had* been fun!

And now she was making him pay for it. She was of two minds about bringing him to the B.A. meeting; but *he* understood ambivalence, so it was all right.

Her relationship with Googie during the week had been unusual, also. Googie hadn't come home at all Saturday night and she came in late Sunday evening long after Lavinia returned. She was reticent and then coy about something 'you'd love to hear'. But she spent most of her time practising the guitar. And now, to Lavinia's surprise, Googie said she wasn't going to the cell meeting this time; she was beginning to feel that she wouldn't be needing it much more. She was obviously a great deal more confident for some reason.

But the best part of the week had been Lavinia's own work. She painted and sketched every evening until nearly two a.m. It left her exhausted and marvellously self-satisfied. She had been so happily wrapped up in the work that it wasn't until Thursday she found the food rotting in the wicker picnic basket where she had left it in the closet Sunday night. She telephoned her mother the second time that week to tell her how delicious the meal had been; how much Googie and she had enjoyed it; and to thank her again for her thoughtfulness and generosity. Her mother's legs were killing her. She would have to put off the shopping spree until spring. Of course, she pointed out with a chuckle, the cheque would still be good.

Whether the drawings or the canvases were any good – objectively speaking – Lavinia tried not to ask herself. There was a vaguely persistent voice somewhere within her that knew no other question, however. She suppressed



it almost all of the time; but she knew she hadn't eliminated it forever. The very idea of an accurate or adequate or honest *objective* judgment was one that had bothered her from college days. She remembered that in her course on aesthetics at Smith, the theme of the semester's reading had been the question: 'Is objective judgment possible?' But she couldn't remember whether it got answered.

Some of the sketches were of objects in the apartment; and some of the views from the windows. The first two canvases (she did one a night) were rather surrealistic: one an imaginary portrait of her brother with the over-all shape of a golf bag, the heads of the clubs sticking out from the top of his crew-cut scalp; the other – variation on a theme – a group of viewers at a Salvador Dali exhibit, but, instead of the watches in the paintings looking flaccid and limp, it was the *watchers* who were soft and oozing. That dissatisfied her – too unoriginal. The third and fourth oils were more gratifying. One was a rather realistic portrait from memory of Jeffrey Bowen, with a small statue of Plato in one hand and the swing of Pleaides in the other. And then a rather John Singer Sargent-ish double portrait of Jeffrey and herself on the portico of a Southern mansion, surrounded by four children, aged two to seven. Three of the children were highly Renoir-oid.

None of the oils was actually a finished work. But Lavinia was impelled by the idea of quantity at the moment; the polishing could come later. The sketches, of course, were properly sketchy, which made them look finished. She did a group of them on the theme of Mother Love, taking as a starting point Rubens' 'Saturn Devouring His Children' and progressing to the manner of Goya's 'Saturn Devouring His Children'.

It had been a splendid week. There was no question in her mind that she was realizing herself, fulfilling herself. She had even had time to take the negligée back to Bergdorf's and get one that was azure blue with lace like bunches of

white lilac, which fitted her better. And now here she was, in the black gown and green pointed hood, anonymously sitting next to Jeffrey Bowen, similarly attired, at a cell meeting of Bourgeois Anonymous. What more could she ask for?

The second gong sounded. The meeting was about to begin. The door was locked and the room was silent as at the moment of creation.

It was remarkable to her how similar it all seemed to the beginning of the first meeting. She had assumed that, somehow, each encounter with The Group would be radically different, since difference is what they were all concerned with. But The Teacher began the evening with a statement of purposes and policies that was strikingly like the one she remembered. Could it be the same speech each time? That might become a bore. But then, there was no way for him to know how many of the disguised audience were there for the first time . . . like Jeffrey. Dear Jeffrey. She wanted to squeeze his hand. She was about to reach for the cloaked arm on her right when it occurred to her that, in manoeuvring about for a seat, she didn't remember whether he was on her left or her right. The figures on either side looked alike. The green hoods above the black cloaks were faced forward toward the lectern, so there was no chance to peek through the eye slits. She felt creepily alone, and clutched her hands together within the mandarin sleeves.

'Take off the mask,' The Teacher was saying, 'that outer layer of Otherness that conceals your Best Self, that phony not-you that prevents the you-you from living gloriously. These are our intentions. ~~This~~ This is how we can help the oppressedly BOURGEOIS such as you here tonight - YOU! Not the persons seated near you! but the intrinsic . . . the inner . . . corrupt mediocrity . . .' he went on and on. 'Read the B.A. Public Information Pamphlets written by committees of experts . . . do not hesitate to telephone: dial

a scare away. Letting go! . . . Why not? Fear of the powers within you, the spirit within you . . . mutual-faith healing . . .’ The voice was beautiful, controlled, the rhetoric admirable. Finally, the invocation over, he paused.

‘After a moment of silence,’ he said, ‘let those here tonight who wish to share their experiences with us take the floor. Let them speak. Those of you who have been here before know what I mean. This is one of the exclusive features of the cell meeting. Anyone who wants to is invited to address the meeting. If you have been here before and you feel that you have benefited from the service of the organization – stand up and tell us about it? Tell us *all*, so that you will strengthen the experience in yourself and, at the same time, help others by standing as an example. Make yourself a symbol of hope to those who may still fear that there is no hope.

‘If you are cured – or well on the way to recovery – or even if you are not, but have some special question you wish to put to this meeting as a whole, stand up and speak out. You will learn more about yourself in the telling and the rest of us can take courage, take counsel, take hope from what you have to say.’

He sounded so noble, Lavinia thought. So generous. So kindly. What would life have been if she had been lucky enough to have had such a man for a father instead of that grumpy, self-righteous, stuffy, dull, good provider? It was too wild a thought to pursue. On second thought, she thought, how bourgeois of her not to pursue it. She crossed her legs.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ a voice said, ‘I would appreciate this opportunity to say a few words.’ It was a low, husky, Yiddish-accented male voice from a hooded and cloaked figure who had stood up close to the middle of the room.

‘I’m accustomed to addressing meetings – but I’ll try to make it short anyhow.’ There was a ripple of laughter. ‘You see, I’m a union organizer . . . This is the way it all started:

my parents brought me here from Lithuania when I was five years old. My father was a bricklayer, my mother did other people's laundry. We lived first in a tenement in the Lower East Side. I went to school for a few years. I even almost learned Hinglish.' There was a ripple of compassionate laughter.

'So we were poor. It wasn't a crime. We were poor and we were *so busy* – we didn't know if we were happy or if we were not-happy. We were! That's all that counted. *We were!* So it was good enough. But my mother and father had hopes for me. They wanted me to have a better life. A twentieth-century life. They didn't want I should be a bricklayer; out of doors in all weather, carrying heavy loads, coming home late every night with a backache. They loved this land of opportunity, and so they made me something better. They made me an electrician. I loved it! It was easy. It was indoors. I didn't get home too late. And the pay wasn't too bad. I ate good. I slept good. I brought money home. Sometimes it was exciting – a big crisis someplace and I had to go out like a doctor in the middle of the night. I was so much having a good time, I got married.

'It wasn't a crime. My wife was pretty, she was sweet. We moved to a tenement in Hell's Kitchen. She was a secretary uptown. Took shorthand and typewriting – a hundred and three words, some minutes. I worked hard. I liked it. I liked the people I worked with. Other Jews. Other Negroes. Swedes. Italians. Poles. All together. In the Melting Pot. We got along good. Not only we were all electricians together. We were all *socialists!* Almost all. The good ones.' There was a ripple of delighted laughter. He *was* different.

'When the time was ripe, I don't want to sound a lack of modesty, but *I* was one of the leading organizers who made us into a union.' For a moment he rested his hand over his heart. 'I did it for the good of all. I thought it would be better. People would get better service. And we would get

better pay; better conditions; better benefits. And why not? For what reason shouldn't electricians – skilled labour – benefit in the expanding redistribution of the economical wealth of this nation? No reason. Was Wall Street the only street to be paved with gold? Fellow Members – Excuse me, I mean Ladies and Gentlemen – the time was *ripe*. So we picked it.

'We weren't interested only in ourselves. We wanted a better world for workers who weren't electrical, too. Believe me. We made contributions. We helped other organizers. We were *so busy* that we thought the socialist world was just beyond the corner.

'Ladies and Gentlemen, I don't have to tell you: it hasn't come yet. We're waiting. We're working. We get more pay and more better conditions and more benefits – but we don't have the socialist world yet. Why the corner is so long I don't know, but we haven't got around it yet.

'So in the meantime; what do we do? My wife doesn't have to work any more – so she almost doesn't make any friends. She doesn't know how to meet people. She doesn't have the easy take-and-give I got with people. She worries about the children. A beautiful boy and a beautiful girl. Good children. What's to become of them? In Hell's Kitchen Shouldn't they have a better opportunity? This is the land of opportunity. Didn't our parents give us a better opportunity? So give *them* a better opportunity. I'm not home so much in the evenings now. Labour meetings go on so long at night. She's alone. She's worried. They're growing up. You can get raped in Hell's Kitchen. You can get stabbed. Things I didn't know about from the Lower East Side, I know about now in Hell's Kitchen. So we move. We move into a beautiful project of five-room houses on an eighth of an acre each in Staten Island. Beautiful. I can commute to work on a ferry boat. Like in Rio de Janeiro, they tell me.

'So now the trouble begins. Who's happy? Who *is*? I don't do electrical working any more. I run a labour union

office. I don't work with my hands any more. I work with a secretary. Electrical working I love; I understand it; it's good for me. The labour union is a duty. I have to do it for the coming of a better world. Who loves a duty? It's a duty! I don't even get home early any more.

'But when I do, who's there? The neighbours. What kind of neighbours? I don't know. I can't figure them out. They're all American. They don't worry about a better world. They're happy with the one they got. They all think labour unions are okay. But then? What? I don't know. It's a world without Jews or Negroes or Swedes or Poles or Italians. Everybody looks alike. Everybody talks alike. Everybody's nice. But I can't remember one from the other.'

There was no laughter in the room now.

'What then? I begin to *like* it. "You don't have to tell them apart," my wife says; "you call the men *Buddy* and you call the women *Honey*. That's all." She's right. It works. We're all having a good time. We tell jokes. We go to parties. The whole world is full of *Buddies* and *Honies*. No problems. Nobody wants anything from me. It's easy. So I think I'm happy.

'Then – so there has to be a crisis, naturally – then! the crisis comes! My son. I have one son. What do you want from a son? You want he should go into business with you! What else? I knew all my life I wanted my one son – Herbert – should come into electrical working with me and into the labour union office (if he was bright enough) with me. Did I ever think I would live to see the day when my own son should say to me: "Electrical work isn't good enough for me. I want to be an executive. I want to go to the Harvard Business School." That's what he said. Just like that. To tell a father that he doesn't want to come into his union with him is one thing bad enough. But to tell him the same breath that he wants to go over to management . . . ' His voice broke.

‘What had I worked and slaved for all these years? To become like all the other Buddies and Honies? To commute from the project in Staten Island thinking maybe that it’s like Rio de Janeiro, Brazil? What for? To go to parties and not worry about how long it is to the corner before we turn around it to the socialist world for everybody? What for?’

‘So I was desperate. I hung my head. I said “What for?” all the time. Then – there has to be a cure, naturally; for a crisis there’s a curative. That’s my motto. It came. The cure. One day in my office when I was alone with one of my four assistant deputies, he says to me: “What for *what* for?” I look at him like a blank. “Why are you always what-foring for these days?” he says to me. So I tell him the whole story. When I’m finished – he smiles. “So what are you smiling?” I ask him. “Because I know what’s a matter,” he says. “SO?” I ask. He whispers, so nobody else should hear – “You’re middle class! That’s what’s happened to you. You got middle class. You’re betraying the socialist evolution!” He almost scares me to death. “What are you talking?” I say. “Me? Betray the evolution? My life I’ve given that socialism should be just around the corner, and he tells me—’ his voice broke with a sob. ‘But he was right!’

‘That’s what happened. What was the crisis? I lied. I told you a lie, Ladies and Gentlemen. The true story is different. *I* wanted to move to Staten Island. *I* was the one who wanted to get along with the Buddies and Honies. *I* liked the parties and the not-worrying.’ He paused. Marshalling the strength to make the final confession, he said, ‘I was the one who said to my son, ‘Herbert: electrical work isn’t good enough for you. I want you should go to the Harvard Business School.’ I like the idea. I *liked* it. Why should it bother me if I didn’t like it?

‘“That’s the worst kind of being bourgeois,” my one-fourth assistant deputy tells me. “That you think your son should be better than you – that’s bourgeois. Socialist is when you’re happy enough that he should be as good as you;

bourgeois is when you want he should be better, but you're scared because you think he won't make it."

"That was the crisis. It was terrible. How could I come back from the middle class? Bad enough my son Herbert himself wanted to join management. But *I* was middle class – deep down, where's the accounting. The crisis was when I found out I liked it. Was it too late? Could I ever really worry again about how far it is to the corner?

"For the crisis there's a cure. You all know, Ladies and Gentlemen – if you're here tonight – then you know all about Bourgeois Anonymous. You know there's a cure. I didn't know. How should I know? Can you imagine my surprise when my friend, one of the assistant deputies – I used to think of him as a rubber stamp because he was always collecting stamps – the surprise when he tells me that he's a member of a secret society to help him stop being bourgeois? Can you imagine? He tells me that he had the same crisis. It wasn't enough he was a union officer and a electrical worker – he lived in Styvesant Town and owned a French poodle! – but his daughter . . . But I can't tell you his story. It's long enough I should tell you my own story. Beside, he could be here tonight for all we know.

"What happened? He brought me here! He used to come regular. I began to see the light. I could tell from the confessional stories I heard that it wasn't impossible. You can get over it. I read the booklets. I read books! I got over it. What did I do? I moved back to Hell's Kitchen. Even with rent control, the prices are up good and high, what with changing hands. But I found a place. I can walk to my office. So what bourgeois walks to work? I sent my wife back to be a secretary again. The kids can take care of themselves now, and she can meet some real people again. But my pride and joy is Herbert. No son of mine is going to any Harvard Business School. Even if he could get in! That satisfaction I'm not giving to management. Home he stays. Electrical work he does. Into the union office he comes. And



when he understands enough he'll appreciate what I've done for him and he'll be happy to be with the other workers when we all together turn the corner into the socialist world – where there isn't any middle class. Where we're all workers together working for a better world! Thank you!' He sat down abruptly. The members of the cell meeting burst into applause, cheers, and shouts of 'Bravo!'

Eventually The Teacher stretched out his arms for silence. 'That was an extremely interesting account we all just heard. Extremely, I must say. Thank you. It certainly points up an additional idea that should be kept clearly in mind. How shall I put it?' He paused for a moment. 'Let us say – *being bourgeois is where you find it!*'

Lavinia felt vaguely uneasy: should she be at a meeting with a socialist and socialist sympathizers?

The Teacher continued: 'Who would have thought that a socialist labour-union organizer might suffer from the attractions of the bourgeoisie? If that's a good question, then the answer is "No one; because no one thinks about it" – unless he, too, is suffering from a similar disgraceful lure. No, there is no doubt in the mind of anyone here tonight, I'm sure, that this man is now back on his own track. Back where he belongs; no longer suffering the drawbacks of middle class stagnation. His dalliance with the middle class and their honied Buddies' (that drew a snicker) 'is over. The fact is that he was always close to his own true self. It was only for a short spell of his life that he was suborned into the error that caused him such pain.' Lavinia made a note to ask Jeffrey what 'suborned' meant.

The meeting was well under way and she felt comfortably tense (uneasy about not knowing which side of her Jeffrey was sitting on) but eager for the examples to strike closer to home.

The next hooded figure to get up interrupted The Teacher right in the middle of a sentence. 'That's enough, old wind-bag,' the tough young voice said.

The Teacher laughed. "That's the spirit! Be spontaneous! Let yourself go. It's good practice - here - for when it really counts. The floor is yours."

'Man . . .' the voice started; and then, after a pause, began the same way again. 'Man - and those of you here who wish you were men . . .' (that drew a nervous laugh.) 'I'll tell you my story. Like, I got my own dough - bread . . . Mine. See? I clip the coupons and I get the green. It's all there, see, in a big daddio-type bank. Just like the rest of you got yours somewhere. Like, for some of you, you know you can go on relief. Like, some of you can go to your papas or your ants-an-uncles. Like, some of you know you can peddle what you got or hock what you got or enlist in the Army. Dig? It's the way in, and the way out. I got this private pot. Born with it, like.

Now, what does a real bright boy graduated from a real slick movie-type-campus college do when he doesn't have to earn his keep? When he can like afford to say to himself "What the hell do you honestly believe? What the hell do you honestly feel? What the hell do you want to do?" *Nothing!* Of course, that's the truth. Man, I mean, like, that's the only truth. The world's a mess. Everybody knows that. Human relations are a mess. You know that. Everything stinks. There is no God, no good, no true, no beautiful. So? I mean like why fight it? Go beat!

'So I move into a hole here on this island, rear a beard, pick my nose, and fuck around. Like a good beat should. . . . I stand in Washington Square in my black chino pants and my black-and-blue shirt, playing my recorder, with my eyes half closed, and I take in the scene. I figure the gay crowd. I write poems about them. In fact, I start a long epic, sort of *Cant-you-bury Tails*, about homosexuals in Provincetown. I'm going to call it *Cape Cod-pieces*; but things change.

'I mean, like I understand . . . I got it all form-you-lay-tit - dig? - but it's sort of literary. What I need is kicks.

'You know. Like one day a guy stops me in the Village

and says: "Why you dressed all in black?" and I tell him: "Like I'm in mourning for the good green world that farts like you turned to ashes." So he says to me: "So do something about it."

"That bothers me. But not too much. Who is he? Some big shot Madison Avenue ad executive probably – creator of a new campaign for selling soap or toothpaste or under-arm deodorant or sink cleaner or washing machine detergents. (I've seen television!) So I say to him: "Cleanliness is next to Godlessness." He figures I'm some kind of nut and takes off. Couldn't follow my line of thought. Probably down in the Village to make out while his wife's in the summer cottage with the kids – making out . . .

"But he bothers me. It's a bad summer. Nixon and Kennedy in some kind of election going on. I took in the scene. A kind of soap opera for keeps.

"Then it happens. There's this big walk-down pay-off, see, and Kennedy comes out like the winner. And there's this big show he puts on for TV in the bar on Eleventh Street where I go, and I see Big Daddy take office – whatever that means. And he gives this big spiel, see. He's *standing* there in the TV box, big as life from the top of his hair down to his navel, and he points his finger at me and he says, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." And, I figure, *he's* just like *me*! I mean, man, he went to college and he doesn't have to earn his keep. He clips coupons, too; like me! And he's got this chick who looks just like the fillies I'm riding with in the Village – the pink pants bit, and the big hair, see. So I figure: make like Jack. I mean, man, if the world's in a mess and Jack comes down to the TV in the bar on Eleventh Street to ask *me* to see what *I* can do for the country – things must be really, man, I mean Real-ee Big-E bad! Jack needs all the help he can get.

"Somebody's got to clean up the mess.

"Sc I junk the junk, see. I go square. I get myself an apart-

ment up on the East Side. I get a closet full of clothes, shoes, ties. Like, you know, you're walking along the street one day and you see another beat, and then you see a guy in a suit with a clean shave and a *bat*, and you say to yourself, "Sonny, which bit part do you want to play like today?" and you answer: "It's about time. Get yourself a shave, and buy a *bat*!" So I make the new scene.

'I get a job down on Nassau Street with the bank where all my coupons are. Then I get a job across the street, selling coupons to other grandpappies. I mean like I've got to be respectable, if I'm gonna help Jack. But, man, is that race way out. Mars.

'But I'm *in*, then, see. I join the Democratic Party. Like I'm gonna help bring about a better world. I don't know from electrical workers or unions or benefits or socialism, I just know The Bomb is bad, and war is bad, and unemployment is bad, and inequality of opportunity is bad, and crime is bad-like. It's bad if you've got to pay taxes for like the upkeep of schools that you wouldn't risk your kid's life to send him to. And it's bad if we can't build better hospitals because we have to build better rockets with better explosions in 'em. Man, I think I ought to stand up and get counted like I'm one of the guys who wants to change things.

'So I do the bit. When I'm down on the Street, I'm sweating my ass off nights in the district headquarters, helping Jack do his bit. I'm married now, but she starts bugging me. We don't do much heavy breathing now – she gets the idea that a *lot* of sex is a neurotic compensation for something. We can't join the Peace Corps because she can't leave it around here where her mother lives and, anyhow, she can't stand countries with a lot of bugs.

'Then the big chance comes. The party asks me to clean up the mess. Run for Congress, they say. You owe it to yourself, they say.

'Man – what do you think happens? Right down there on

Nassau Street. I tell the guys, and what do you think they do? They hold a meeting and send a delegate to take me aside and give me a good talk. Dig that. Like here I am two years in a first-class respectable brokerage house and I don't know till then there is a half-dozen guys there who belong to this here secret organization, like - B.A. "What am I sweating for?" they ask me. Crime is bad? Unemployment is bad? The warfare state is bad? What am I talking about? they ask me. Those aren't ideas; they're just bourgeois prejudices. They come from Christianity and Judaism and all those humanisms, and nobody believes in them, so how can I? They aren't policies or political plans; they're just the twitches of the middle-class conscience, they say.

'Get with it, man, they tell me: you're too old not to know that our kind of politics doesn't make things better. The only question that people in office try to answer is: How can we keep things from getting much worse? I mean like if you *want* to keep them from getting much worse. But if you want to make them real better - I mean like if you got a plan - then you're not a politician, man; you're a radical.

'So why do I want to run for office? they ask. What's the matter; can't I get a big stick in private? Do I have the trauma or something? Like, why advertise my problems, they say. It's like wanting to be a butcher or selling women's underwear.

'So I figure, okay, I give up. I like the idea of political power because the chick and I almost never rub bellies any more. (And, hell, if it isn't free and easy, who wants it?)

'Okay. So I move back to the Village. I go back to my black clothes and my recorder and I grow the beard again. Why not? Sandals really are more comfortable. And I come to these meetings. That helps. But every once in a while I get that awful feeling, right here in the pit of my stomach, that somebody ought to be cleaning up the mess. Maybe it's compensation for something I ate. But who *is* helping Jack? Anyhow, like I wonder what *he's* compensating for.'

He sat down and dropped into total anonymity as suddenly as he had emerged. The membership was caught by surprise. Lavinia felt as if the man had somehow disappeared from the room before the uncertain applause ended.

'Splendid!' The Teacher said. 'And thank you. Even personal thanks from this old windbag.' There was laughter.

'Imagine!' Lavinia mused. 'During the whole speech, The Teacher must have been thinking of nothing but the fact that he felt offended. Well, there's good reason why *he* keeps coming . . .'

'You have heard a most interesting personal history, ladies and gentlemen. A Beatnik - pardon me, I mean a Beat - has confessed to the lure of bourgeois prejudices. A curious juxtaposition to the report before his. Gives you pause, doesn't it.'

'Gives me a pain in the ass,' someone shouted.

There was a ripple of uneasiness. A few members laughed. Most looked around at each other's mirror image, expressing only sighs or tongue-clicks of disapproval.

'Interesting situation,' The Teacher improvised. 'If one disapproves of that remark, is it because it is vulgar? That would be bourgeois prejudice. Because it is intellectually denigrating? That would be more objective. But I disapprove of it because it breaks the discipline here.' He paused. 'Our mutual goal may be to become more spontaneous, more imaginative, better integrated in ourselves. But let's not do it at each other's expense here. Understand!' The room was silent. It was obvious who was master in this house.

'Why?'

Only Lavinia, suddenly too frozen to feel even scared-to-death, recognized Jeffrey's voice. He had been sitting on the right of her all the while.

'"Why?" you ask? I'll tell you why. Because group discipline is the beginning of self-discipline. And no one can get the best out of himself without self-discipline. There have to

be rules. There have to be regulations. But everything depends on whose rules you abide by in your own inner life – your own, or somebody else’s.’ The hooded heads nodded approvingly. ‘This isn’t a debating society. You can learn all about it on your own time. Read the information pamphlet entitled *Self-Discipline for Spontaneity!*’ With a sweeping motion of his arms, The Teacher dispelled the air of tenseness in the room. ‘Another report?’ he said quietly. The point of his hood stood high as he waited for a response.

‘I’d appreciate the chance to say a few words.’

Lavinia felt infinitely relieved that it was not Jeffrey but a woman.

‘I have the feeling that the two men who have spoken so far this evening are more nearly – a little more nearly – beginners in this great enterprise (this personal enterprise) than I am. Perhaps I may help to balance the evening by speaking up. I might confess that I think of myself a little more than not as a “senior” member. I’ve been coming here a number of years, and I am a member of the staff sent out by our Despair switchboard when calls of distress come in. I’m on duty Tuesdays.’

She took a deep breath. ‘Well, now, this is where *my* story begins. I was married the day after I graduated from Sarah Lawrence. My husband, who was six years older than I, had just completed his residency at Doctor’s Hospital and was about to open his own private practice. He took an office on Park Avenue and we moved into a house in Larchmont. At that point we were nearly fifty thousand dollars in debt. But we seemed to be just like everyone else we knew. We had two cars and we belonged to the yacht club, but we couldn’t afford more servants than a cleaning woman once a week. By the time we had two children, and belonged to a country club, and began paying for private schools, dancing classes, and play groups, we couldn’t even afford the cleaning woman.

‘Then extraordinary things happened to me. I gradually

realized that I was living the life of a completely split personality. During the day I was a housemaid, cook, delivery chauffeur, laundress, and gardener. During the evening I wore Norell culottes and entertained (or was entertained by) Larchmont crust from eight to midnight, and then was supposed to be some kind of high-priced call girl for my husband.

'The absurdity of it struck me with no humour whatsoever. Here I was, wasting my talent, my birthright, my training, never picking up a book, spending valuable energy gossiping with the grocer, the cleaners – even other mothers – and at night, growing simply euphoric about movies, television, children, and taxes. Passing the hours with equally expensive people in expensive houses, clubs, or restaurants, talking exclusively about "popular culture" but implying always that we were just slumming, as if in private we were re-reading Whitehead or Gibbon or collecting Ming jade, but in public, we had to pander to the common interests. We could always assume that everyone *had to* know what was going on with Ben Casey or the private life of Bing Crosby. But of course, it was nothing of the kind. We had no place to slum from. Mass culture was the only kind of culture we experienced.

'It was even worse than when I was a girl and the men would talk about baseball or football and the women would sit on the fringes of a group and keep their mouths shut. A woman could at least *think* of worthwhile things then. But it's impossible now. No man can get away with shutting the women out of a conversation today, so sports have dropped out of such evenings.'

Lavinia became aware that she had been vigorously shaking her head up and down, so much so that the eye slits of her hood were now covering her left ear. She adjusted it and sat back stiffly, hearing the woman again.

'Well . . . there I was, a split-level personality, and hating both of them. I simply had to face facts. I felt dead. I saw



less and less of my husband, who worked harder and harder to make more money to go deeper into debt in order to buy me more expensive gifts to make up for seeing less and less of me. And, anyway, he turned out to be something different from what I had believed in.

'I thought that, of all people, doctors were motivated by a profound compassion for human beings and then by a never-ending respect for the continuing progress of medical science. Well, my husband had gone to a professional school instead of a trade school, and he was an M.D. instead of a plumber but, at heart, he was an empty coffer out to get rich quick. His craft just happened to pay better than plumbing.

'At any rate, I realized that he didn't need me. A house-keeper and a call girl together would cost him less than he was paying for me. And I realized that my children didn't need me, either. After all, I was taught that character is almost completely formed by the time you're five or six; and I barely saw them, anyhow. Somebody else could drive them from the school to the play group, to the dance class, to the cub scouts, and put them to bed. So I quit. I walked out - without leaving a forwarding address. As a matter of fact, my husband divorced me on the grounds of desertion. It was one of the few honest divorces I've ever heard of . . . ' There was a snicker of agreement throughout the cell membership.

'Now, I was able to do this because I believed in myself as an artist. I was determined not to throw my life away in the tedium of washing socks and listening to homework and worrying about debts. *I was creative*; I was determined to be creative; my education had given me nothing in this whole world to respect or to appreciate or to find intrinsically worthwhile except being creative.'

Lavinia sat bolt upright; again, her body rigid with concentration.

'I knew I could paint and draw. I had worked at it in college,' the woman continued.

Yes, yes, Lavinia assented: Go on! Then what happened?

'I travelled. I went from Spain to India to Japan to California. I painted what I saw with my eyes and what I saw with my heart. I came to know the world and my own soul. Bird-free I flew from country to country, travelling light and producing one beautiful work after another. When I came back to America and settled here in New York, living quietly and productively in a studio in Brooklyn Heights, I was prepared to present my works to the public.

'Nobody liked what I did. The first year I had a show downtown and the critics said my style was academic, eclectic, and derivative. Paid sycophants of the lunatic fringe in the art market. The second year I was taken on by a gallery uptown. The critics panned it for the opposite reasons. "Too independent," they said; "Too far out." Absurd right-wing middle-class reactionaries. The third year I couldn't get a gallery to take me on. *No one* liked *anything* I was doing. Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you: is there any better proof of the fact that I am being true to myself? That I am original? That my work is unique?'

There was a shower of applause from the audience. But Lavinia and the man on her right sat icily immobile. Jeffrey Bowen whispered to her, 'The illusion of our epoch.'

'Confident in my talent,' the woman continued, 'secure in my determination to be my best self and paint uniquely and originally – I have no doubt that I shall go on being creative. It is only that, now and then, a certain *nocturne* overcomes me. It is not that I have doubts concerning the value of what I am doing. Rather, it is a niggling attitude, an anxiety, a suspicion that I have paid too high a price. It comes on me in moments when I have a terrible desire to rest from the exhausting labours of being creative, unique, and original. I recall how restful it was to be all dressed up, elegant and perfumed, and spend an evening with people who would never for an instant conceive of getting serious or asking you to "define your terms" or justify anything at

all. How comforting it was to be among people who had no more idea of *what it was all about* than you were assumed to have; who were so afraid of life that they would never dare run the risk of reminding you that you might be afraid, too; to be with people always comfortably, superficially personal.

'And then, there was the variety of satisfaction. Granted, what I am doing now is profoundly, *deeply intense* because I can attend to it with unflagging attention. I have almost no distractions. No one to cook meals for, no need to dress up, no going out on dates, no small talk, no shopping for party clothes, no arrangements for the children's education or amusement, no *petty* details. But, oddly enough, there are times when I miss the variety of the bourgeois distractions. There used to be so many *kinds* of satisfaction. The pleasures taken in seeing the laundry all done and neatly folded in the basket in the basement was different from the pleasure of listening to the children recite their lessons in the evenings. The pleasure of cooking an old familiar dish my husband loved was something entirely unlike the pleasure of listening to his bad puns. Even the pleasure of planting, weeding, and cultivating irises and tiger lilies and roses and nasturtiums was different from cutting them and arranging them; and that again was different from enjoying them in the different rooms where they would be placed and in the variety of vases that held them. Lalique and Baccarat and striped coloured bowls from Murano. There was such a variety! So many details! So much depended on me then! But they were the *same* things that all the other middle-class women were depended on to do. They were the same things that all those half-realized women took pleasure in.

'Only when I remember *that* does the intensity, the single-mindedness, of what I am doing now shine out bright and pure and far more valuable against the darkness of that peace and simplicity and wealth of rich detail. Now it is not a question of reflected glory. It is no longer a matter of others depending on me. It is only I who depend on myself. I may

be missed by certain people in this time and this place, but I will not have missed out on my chance to make my mark on eternity!’

There was a thunderclap of applause; only Lavinia was clapsless. She closed her eyes over the tears that veiled them. She closed her hearing against the sound of The Teacher sonorously making his interpretation of the woman’s statement, of The Teacher’s rhetoric invoking dedication and rededication to the Great Ideals toward which the members of Bourgeois Anonymous strove together, separate but equal in the longing that each felt, etc, etc, etc. While the responsive reading of memorized prayers went on and the cell meeting concluded with a psalm, Lavinia felt her spirit slump back to the small cave where she would try to hide from her fears: listening and listening again to the words of the woman who threatened her with the idea that this was herself. Lavinia: older, failed, alone – and deluded. This was Lavinia with even less talent than Lavinia might have, with slightly more money to run away from; with slightly more guts with which to make a clean breast of things – ‘without leaving a forwarding address’; with slightly less of the pull from the magnet toward all the various trivia that had brought satisfaction to her . . . Lavinia thinking: she had not yet even had that variety of satisfactions to reject. Wondering whether she had been spared or whether she had been cheated. Lavinia confused and torn apart . . .

‘It’s over,’ Jeffrey said, lifting her by the elbows. ‘Most of the people have left.’

‘I’m sorry.’ Her voice was weak and tearful. ‘Let’s go.’

The mood did not leave her even when they had driven up Fifth Avenue to a skyscraper with a restaurant-bar at the fiftieth floor. Silently they sat at a window table before the expansive view. In the cold clear light they could see all of Manhattan north from the beginning of Central Park; west to New Jersey; east to Queens. Lights stood in straight

lines along the streets, and ran like effervescent bubbles up and down the tall buildings. On the roads the traffic drew streaking trails of white and red lights in opposite directions. A small candle burned inside a hurricane lamp on the table between them. Jeffrey held her hand in his. But Lavinia felt as remote and invisible as if she still wore the black gown and green hood. Nothing seemed to call upon her to come out of the fear-cave.

Jeffrey took his hand from her palm and replaced it with a ten-dollar bill. 'A thousand pennies for your thoughts,' he said gently.

'You didn't like it at all,' she answered.

Cautiously he said, 'I'm glad I went.'

'How circumspect. How kind.' She smiled. 'You don't want to offend me. Funny, I thought some of it might offend you; but it ended up with *my* feeling offended.'

'Why?'

'That woman – the artist – the one whose paintings nobody likes and nobody wants . . .'

'The one who gave up a home and family, everything a woman might . . .'

'And who thinks she's going to make her mark on history – be appreciated by posterity . . . *Creative*, unique . . .'

'Yes. Why did it upset you so much?'

'The spirit of Christmas future.'

'Afraid it will turn out like that for you?'

'Don't sound so remote,' she snapped. 'It involves you, too, you know. What if we were married and it was you I walked out on . . .'

She looked at the ten-dollar bill in her hand and suddenly put it into her handbag. 'See?' But there wasn't enough aggressiveness in her, and she slumped back in her chair.

Jeffrey asked quietly, 'Do you feel that you have to make your mark on history? Be appreciated only through your products and only by a distant posterity?'

'Better than nothing.'

'Is that the alternative?'

'That's what it looks like to me.'

'How about being appreciated by me, here and now; and for the immediate future.'

'Love is a big fat illusion, to quote *The Times*. And how can you bank on even the "immediate future"?'

'And the "mark on history" is less illusory and distant posterity something surer to bank on?'

She pondered silently for a while before saying, 'I'm sure I don't know.'

'I suppose the price of genius is loneliness.'

It occurred to Lavinia that Jeffrey actually knew what he was talking about; for him, that statement was not simply a copybook maxim. She was surprised to be reminded that he was a genius. She said, 'But my trouble is that I'm not even sure of having some talent, let alone genius. What's left for me?'

'My analyst says that all we're seeking is love and enduring values.'

She snickered. 'Is that all?'

'Well, just how lonely do you think you can be and still stand it?'

It struck her that this was the crucial question: that she had never in her life actually endured the loneliness of being without something she valued or someone who loved her – or said there was love for her – or even, at the very least, someone to talk to. Remembering the night she was alone and wanted to make love (when she ended up telephoning Vincent), even then she could count on Googie coming back sooner or later, and the next day being caught up with the whole tangle of friends and relatives and 'beau' . . . But this very evening, during the time that she sat hooded and cloaked at the cell meeting, unsure of which side of her Jeffrey was sitting on, she felt alone, abandoned. on her own, with an uneasiness that frightened her. 'You mean to say that people finally sell out their Best Selves just because

they can't take the risk of being alone?' She was vehement now. 'I mean really *alone*! And that's why they settle for all the niggling little accommodations and compromises and minimizing quiet desperations?'

'What gives with you people and this "Best Self" jazz?'

Lavinia realized how fully he accepted her being one of the 'you people' of Bourgeois Anonymous. 'What's wrong with that?'

'The Teacher this evening, – the pamphlet, – everything I've ever heard you say about it sounds so naïve. As if it's all black or white. The Outside Life is all Bad and the Inside Life is all Good. Get rid of the bourgeois crust on the outside and you'll be your 'Best Self' as soon as the inside is the outside.' He laughed: a short humourless snort.

'What's so naïve about that?'

'No matter how many layers you peel off, there's always an inside and always an outside. It's like saying: the last car of a train is always the one that gets hit in a railroad accident. So let's leave off the last car! – You *can't* win.'

'You mean you can't ever be your Best Self?'

'No. I didn't say that. I just mean that you don't have to identify your best self with whatever you take to be on the inside, and your worst self with what happens to be on the outside. As a matter of fact, you can't ever know what would be your best self. Why throw away chances? Why cut yourself off from Larchmont to end up in Brooklyn Heights? You always have to be somewhere. You always have to have some "outside" shell. Whatever your life comes to be worth depends on the interplay between the inside and the outside, not just on one *or* the other. The interplay! Like in interpersonal relations.'

'Oh, that analytic jingo again . . .'

He smiled. 'I try to talk your B.A. lingo . . .'

They had a second round of drinks.

Lavinia said, 'That woman did sound rather like a fool, didn't she?'

Jeffrey thought about her a while. 'You know - she sounded like your father talking about his hole-in-one, or my mother telling the story of her grease-gun squirt victory.'

'That's a twist. You mean: outcasts, bourgeois, or incast, it's always a matter of prizes and medals and framable diplomas. No matter which circle you stand in on the social scene: you either win the trophy or you can't love yourself?'

'Free enterprise,' he said.

'How depressing!' Lavinia sounded defeated.

'No, no. That's not it at all. You can think of it that way; but that's as if you don't know about ambivalence. What you ought to do is cultivate awareness of the good and the bad sides of everything. The pros as well as the cons. The virtues as well as the vices. There's real creativity and phony creativity: a good bourgeoisie and a false.'

Thoughtfully, Lavinia echoed his earlier statement: 'No matter how many layers you peel off, there's always an inside and an outside. . . . And what if you're peeling off the layers of an onion? And I'm that onion? And I end up with nothing. Empty. Hollow. A zero.'

'If you have to use a metaphor for human life . . .'

'You have to! There's no other way to talk about it.'

'Then either you have an onion or nothing. But the nothing is not something at the heart of an onion. Why make it an onion? Use a rose. Take apart the petals of a rose, take out the innermost parts, separate the petals and remove the stem, and what have you? Nothing. But you don't have a rose any more, either. You either have the object whole or the object dissected. But you can't take something apart and then say there was nothing there to begin with.' He smiled. 'Don't you feel better being compared with a rose rather than an onion?'

'Is that all you're doing? Trying to make me feel better?'

'Ye shall know the truth and the truth will make ye free.'

'Free of what?'

'Free of feeling lousy.'



They had their third drink. Lavinia put her elbows on the table and rested her sad face on her hands. 'Are you trying to tell me that every time I peel off some of the outer layer of my life and let some more of the inside breathe fresh air, that I develop a new inner behind the new outer and the whole process begins again?'

'Uh-huh! Complicated, isn't it? You can see why some people stay in psychoanalysis for ten years.'

'And others keep going to Bourgeois Anonymous meetings all their lives . . .'

'Yes.'

'Isn't there any way out?'

'Sure. The elevator down to the lobby.'

'Rat. I mean any way out of this cyclical process?'

'I don't think so, sweet darling. I think that's life. The real and the true life. Believe me.'

Lavinia's eyes welled with tears. 'I wish you'd take me home.'

## Chapter Nine

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As they were courting, her wish was his command.

He took her home. He kissed her goodnight in the front hall of the building and she walked up the stairs, sad and lonely, and chilled to the bone. She let the chill seep in, alternately believing that she deserved it (she offered so little warmth to the world in return) and that it underlined the world's betrayal (if the world were warmer she would never feel unworthy or inadequate). Who had told her that the solution to this world's ills was to move New York City to Florida?

The lights were on in the apartment. As soon as Lavinia saw the three suitcases in the centre of the main room she shouted for Googie, who came out of the bedroom with a shopping bag full of shoes in both hands. Googie looked simultaneously coy and wicked. 'What's going on!' Lavinia demanded.

'I'm taking French leave – if I understand the phrase.'

'What are you talking about?!' Lavinia dropped her coat on the daybed and both of them sat down at the cold fireplace – facing each other. The shopping bag rested on Googie's lap.

In calm measured tones, the answer came out: 'I'm leaving for a while.'

‘Why?’

‘Steel yourself, darling; I have a rather surprising surprise for you.’

‘Yes?’

‘I’m moving in with Vincent Guarcello.’

‘I don’t believe it!’

Offended, Googie said: ‘You’d better believe it.’

‘No, I mean – Oh, God, what the hell is this all about?’

Googie rested the shopping bag against the fireplace and became chatty. ‘Well, I thought of telling you sooner: but I wanted to make sure first. We met at the Village Folk Sing eight days ago.’

‘He goes for folk music?’

‘Why not?’

‘I wouldn’t have thought he was the type.’

Coldly Googie said: ‘And you wouldn’t have thought *I* was his type, either, would you?’

‘No.’

‘Let’s not be quite so sure of ourselves, Lavinia. There are more things in heaven and hell than dreamed of in your psychology, Lavinia. People needn’t be type cast so simply. Why shouldn’t he like folk music? And why should he go for only one type?’

‘I knew his first wife.’

‘Are you trying to say I’m not equal to the glamour girl allure? Well, maybe you ought to consider the reason why that marriage didn’t work out.’ She seemed to become tired of sounding bitchy. ‘Lavinia,’ she confided happily, ‘this is the first time he’s ever had an affair with a girl who wears glasses!’

‘Is that the line he used to seduce you?’

‘Don’t be vulgar.’

‘What are you being?’ They stood up and glowered at each other.

‘Let’s sit down,’ Lavinia began, ‘and be reasonable.’

They sat down, at least.

'First of all – even if you two are having a perfectly lovely affair, why move in with him?'

Googie laughed, and then went coy again. 'It makes everything so much simpler, darling. Nobody has to go home in this cold weather.'

Lavinia sighed, 'And you were thinking of getting contact lenses.'

'Well, I won't for a while; at least now.'

'And what happens when warm weather comes, and one of you would rather that the other had to "go home"?''

'How can you worry about *that* distant a future? Or are you worried about the rent? Now, don't worry about the rent. I'll keep paying my share. I mean to keep a *pied à terre* – in case I need it at a moment's notice. One never knows about anything. Besides, I'll have to keep this address for my family – letters, I mean, and visits.'

'At least *this* one never knows about anything . . .'

'Don't feel left out, Lavinia; you have yours! The only difference is that he wants to marry you.' She had become solicitous, and stroked Lavinia's cheek. 'Don't take it too hard. Maybe he'll come around.'

'Ridiculous.'

'Your father's favourite expression, isn't it, Lavinia . . .'

'You know that's hitting below the belt.'

'If that's the only way to bring you to your senses, I'm glad I said it. Let's face facts, Lavinia. What do you think all my effort with Bourgeois Anonymous has been for? I really wanted to outgrow my mediocre morality. And now I'm doing it!'

'By having a fly-by-night romance . . .'

'What a cute obscene expression . . .'

' . . . just like any other filly in the Village. Sensual. Unrepressed. And irresponsible. Sleeping around. Bed hopping . . .'

'Just a minute. I haven't had an affair since my divorce became final. Now what is all this "sleeping around" about? I'm going to live with Vincent because I like him . . .'

'And you don't want to catch cold.'

'I want to enjoy it to the fullest.'

'But what's to come of it? There's no future in it for you. He's a certified public cocksman. How long can he be faithful? A week? Ten days? Maybe even the gigantic total of a **WHOLE MONTH!**'

Softly, Googie asked, 'What difference does it make? I'll be enjoying myself right now; and that's all that counts.'

They were silent and stared at each other.

'What will become of you, Googie?' Lavinia asked.

Almost equally plaintively, Googie responded: 'I'll grow older – without having missed as much of the fun as I've been missing up to now.' They fell silent again. 'You don't have any answer to that, do you, Lavinia?'

Lavinia picked her nails.

'What's to become of any of us, Lavinia? There's the bomb, and all that, hanging over our heads . . .'

'I'll bet the cave men used the bow and arrow to make most of the local cave women . . .'

'Well, it's more likely they were younger and didn't worry over what Big Daddy thought about their behaviour, anyhow. If we were in a different society, we would have sown our wild oats when we were fourteen, so we could settle down by this time of life; but, in our society, we either have to do it now – or it will be too late.'

'Do we *have* to do it?'

'If we're going to be different from the vast majority. If we're to get over being bourgeois. If we want to be different!'

'But don't you think it would be even more different if we could get over being bourgeois without becoming promiscuous?'

'I don't see how it can be done.' Googie stood up. 'Or are you just trying to justify *marrying* your Mr Bones? It certainly looks to me as if you're headed for that fall.'

'You ~~think~~ I'm weak, don't you?'

'I just think you have a longer way to go to get over being bourgeois than I have - now.'

Lavinia looked up and grasped one of Googie's hands in both of hers. 'I'll miss you, Googie.'

'We'll talk on the phone.'

'It won't be the same.'

'You're a good friend, Lavinia.' They embraced with tears in their eyes.

Vincent was late at the office the next morning; he had moved Googie's things at the beginning of the day so that she would be in his apartment waiting, with a warm meal ready for him, when he got back that night. Any thought of the situation oppressed Lavinia. The sense of loss pervaded her mind: not missing out on something that others have and that she lacked; not that at all. But a sense of no escape; the feeling that gradually but inescapably what was being lost was the ground she stood on. The slow crumbling away of anything firm. For a long time now she had felt that she could stand secure on a tiny island, nothing more than an atoll in a mass of shifting undependable depths. She had hoped to make clear to herself what the island consisted of, so that she would know sensibly how to cultivate her garden. But now even the safe island was growing smaller; collapsing at the edges, falling off into the surrounding chaos. In the end - she would sink and be swallowed up: characterless, and undifferentiated from the sea.

The days of the week moved at a snail's pace. Turning a page on her office calendar was like lifting a coffin lid. Jeffrey had phoned on Monday night to say he was going up to Cambridge for the week. He wanted to do some personal work on the computers at M.I.T. His friends in the lab there would let him use the machines free - if he worked only during the night.

It was as if he had cut the one remaining tie she had to the earth - and she felt herself floating loose and weightless

as a balloon; without direction but for what the wind wanted. She had no desire to work. Every evening she came home from the office alone, ate something alone, and sat before the blank canvas or the blank drawing pad, alone and paralyzed. She listened to the noises of the others in the house, to the sounds of life on the street below her window, rather than turn on the phonograph or go out to a movie. There was nothing to count on. Nothing to be sure of.

She told herself that she had to be more concretely goal-motivated; she had to get a grip on her integration process; she had to solidify her frame of reference. But somehow all of the ideas had gone stale. The words were no help; and she felt her intuitive powers were being withdrawn from her. Had her spontaneity dried up entirely? Instead of wearing falsies (a subterfuge she hadn't required since the age of seventeen) would she now, in the ripeness of her mid-twenties, need some kind of spiritual falsies – *fake* interests; *fake* imagination; simulated spontaneity?

She pictured Googie's clothes hanging in Vincent's closet, and the two of them kissing over bacon and eggs at a midnight snack in the kitchen. Playing house. Playing honeymoon. Since the honeymoon is the only good part of a marriage, – why risk anything else? That's the Bourgeois Anonymous question. Just go from one honeymoon to another. For how long? Ah, but that's the bourgeois question.

She imagined herself married to Mr Bones. Sinking more and more quickly into middle-class mediocrity, indifference, sleeping-sickness. Because that was where Jeffrey wanted her to head. And, to head her – right back to the White Plains and the TV and the 'What's new?' brainlessness she'd come out of. Or thought she was coming out of it. But where else was there to head? She couldn't be a beatnik; she didn't like to be dirty or not know where her next meal was coming from or wear unattractive clothes, or think about Zen. If

the truth had to be known: she didn't even like folk music. What were the alternatives?

And then the worse possibility of all formulated itself in her mind. What if there was no way out for her? What if she couldn't compromise and marry Bowen, or go home to White Plains, or become a beatnik? What if she had to live out her life going to the office every day and coming home every night – to a private life that consisted of phonograph records and the movies, an occasional lunch with an old acquaintance, an occasional spurt of painting, an occasional 'honeymoon' – and then old age, dyed hair, tight corsets, and liquor; and the gruesome idea of being found – by the cleaning woman – dead-for-three-days, in *this* apartment!

The Lonely Life. The Lonely Crowd. The Trail of the Lonesome Pine. The One and Lonely . . . Just how different would *that* be!

Jeffrey sent a present with a note every day, even from Boston. Flowers, and then wine, and then an antique gold locket engraved from J.W.H. to C.B.F., dated June 23, 1883, and containing a pressed curl of golden hair. A single lock of hair. Lavinia thought it touchingly odd. A love token. A lover's gift almost a century old. The lovers long since dead, no doubt. It would be just the kind of thing Jeffrey might do: ransack a junk shop or an antique store in search of something unusual, something bizarre, that in the long run would say to her – lovers die and pass out of memory; but love continues. Not in an unbroken chain. Nothing like 'To you from falling hands we throw the torch.' Just the fact that love can continue. By leaps and bounds. Desultorily. Within the human species. It was precisely the sort of oddball approach that Mr Bones would use to say – do not abandon the human race! Do not give yourself over so thoroughly to an idea of your-own-private-separate-self that you forget you: sex, your part in a social life, your class, your future, even the possibility of someone in the year 2067 finding a Golden Apple from Jeffrey to Lavinia, long



since dead and passed out of memory, to help them believe that love is worth-while, that love is worth the chance. What sign of intimacy would represent them? A lock of hair had long since gone out of fashion as the most intimate gift. What could represent them?

And so the line of thought brought Lavinia back to the sense of loss. There were no signs, no symbols, no signposts and no maps. If she were to be non-conformist, then: there were no ceremonies, no rituals, no rites; everything would have to be 'created'.

The hours were flat and tasteless; she worked in her office during the day, and at night – she waited. And everything that touched her – each of her memories, the gold locket, even the questions she raised – touched only sore points or the soft flesh of her mind, bruised and tender, without response, let alone resistance. Numbed. Chilled. Fearful. Afraid.

She leaped up when the phone rang; and cursed loneliness when it turned out to be a wrong number. When Googie phoned to tell her how happy she was, Lavinia cursed the right number and wanted only to be left alone. Jeffrey phoned on Thursday night to say he hoped to be back on Sunday if the roads weren't too icy for driving. Otherwise, he'd come in on Monday.

Weightless, drifting, alone. She could figure out nothing in advance. She could make no plan. She felt no compelling desire. She thought of how curious it is that modern psychology should have given her the impression that compulsions are bad and that normal, healthy spontaneity should be free of them; but, at the same time, to have left her with the idea that the true artist is one who is compulsive – compelled to create by a force greater than the self. Without that 'wind singing through us' – no music. Can you unearth the compulsions that are bad for you without uprooting the compulsions that are good for you? Could Bourgeois Anonymous help her overcome a lifetime of bad habits and expect that 'good habits' – the Best Self – would

then just grow up, all by itself? Can the idea generate the event? By the time she reached that thought, she was sick with dissatisfaction, sick of hand-wringing, and sick with fear. In her desperation she realized that she had reached rock bottom. She reached for the telephone – and called her mother.

‘How are you, darling? I’m so delighted to hear from you! Isn’t the weather dreadful? Is there enough heat in your apartment? You know, you shouldn’t be afraid of complaining to the landlord. They try to get away with the least amount of heat in those old apartment buildings. But you can threaten them: tell him you’ll call the housing authority!’

‘It’s all right, Mother. The apartment is warm enough.’

‘But I can tell something’s wrong, Livy. I can hear it in the tone of your voice.’

‘Yes.’

‘Are you and Googie getting along all right?’

‘Oh, yes; Googie’s very happy these days.’

‘I’m glad to hear that. *We’re* thinking of going to Florida for a few weeks, Livy. It was quite a surprise – I can tell you – to have Dad come home the day before yesterday . . . or was it Monday? . . . Anyhow, he said he’s just made a killing (you know how I hate that expression) and he thought we just owed it to ourselves to give ourselves a little vacation. Of course, we’ll take Gramp with us (we have to). And we’ll find a fairly inexpensive way to do it. I think we’ll go to Orlando. There’s a golf course there for Dad. We’ll be away two weeks! I hope we can get all the arrangements made quickly. But you know how hard it is to get the reservations you want! We’d like to leave in about three weeks. Now, Livy, tell me what’s wrong. Tell Mother.’

‘There isn’t much to say . . .’

‘Has Jeffrey made any – how should I put it? – any false moves?’

‘No. He’s a perfect gentleman.’

‘Is it your job?’

'It's nothing in particular.'

'Is it that time of the month?'

'Yes,' Lavinia lied. 'It is.'

'Oh, well, then, darling, that's nothing to get all disturbed about. Don't let it aggravate you. You know it will pass soon. It's our burden: but then every woman knows that it doesn't last long and that's all you have to keep telling yourself. Get a cheerful magazine, and a warm milk, and bundle yourself up in bed, and it will pass before you know it. I'm just sure of that, Livy.'

'I hope you're right, Mother.' There were tears in her voice.

'Oh, Livy, I hate to hear you sound so unhappy. Livy - I miss you. You know how much we think about you, don't you?'

'Yes.'

'We used to be such good friends. I know it sounds silly, but a mother really does hate to see her children grow up and leave her.'

'Yes.'

'Would you like to come home for the weekend?'

Silence.

'We'd take good care of you. We'd love to have you.'

Lavinia waited until her voice was steady enough. 'I can't, Mother; much as I'd like to. Jeffrey's in Boston but he's coming back tomorrow,' she lied, 'and I promised to see a lot of him this weekend.' Why was it always necessary to lie, always easier to lie, always simpler?

'Well, in that case I expect he'll help cheer you up. Just tighten your belt; stiff upper lip; always be a lady; you'll come through with flying colours! Livy? - do you remember when I used to put a gold star up on the pantry door when you came home with good grades from school? Remember? Now, you be a good girl and get over this period—I mean, this period of unhappiness . . . and you know what? - I'll past. a gold star on the door for you. Won't that be like

old times? I'll get the stars at the stationery store tomorrow. What do you say, Livy? Doesn't that cheer you up?

'Yes . . .'

'Now! I knew it would.' Her big voice was all smiles. 'You should call more often, Livy. I love talking to you. You know, you mustn't forget your old mother. I'm still good for some things, you see,' she chuckled. 'Don't you, Livy?'

'Yes, Mother. Thank you, Mother.'

'That's a good girl. Goodnight, now, Livy darling. Pleasant dreams.'

'Goodnight, Mother.'

Lavinia hurled herself onto the daybed and burst out weeping. Great long howling cries broke her into tiny fragments. She saw herself hopelessly lost, betrayed, confused, abandoned; without resources; without a future; sinking; sinking . . . doomed!

Clutching the pillow, she cried herself to sleep.

The night's sleep did not exhaust the mood. In the morning, she went to the office for the last workday of the week, dressed in black, without make-up or jewellery: advertising the death of her soul, the sense of encroaching dissolution. Unable to concentrate on the day's work, she faced the drawing board with her eyes closed for an instant and in that moment of sinking – she suddenly recognized that she had reached despair. This was the nature of the experience. This is what it felt like; the sense of loss having carried her to the conviction of total helplessness – there was no hope! Absolutely none whatsoever. *This is despair*. And then it came to her as if a light had been switched on behind her closed eyelids: of course – but why hadn't she thought of it before? – she would have only to telephone DESPAIR to have someone from Bourgeois Anonymous come to help her. It didn't matter who. It might even be the woman who went around the world in order to get from Larchmont to Brooklyn Heights. No;

she was on duty Tuesdays. No matter. *Someone* would come! *Someone* would help! There might be a reprieve.

The earth about her feet was shored up; not the whole world had turned to quicksand. There was still time. There was still just a chance. She felt refreshed with hope. She set about her day's work with a little relish. The numbness relaxed, the chill was warmed. The fear held at arm's length. She smiled with the secret knowledge of one more chance.

The office boy came pottering in with the mail and the house distribution of an advance copy of *Thought*.

'You ever read this?' he asked.

'Sometimes.' She thought of Jeffrey's article (. . . too good for me . . .) 'Do you?'

'I was looking through it while the mail was gettin' sorted. See this?' He opened it to the editorial page. 'I read this. It's about an organization called Bourgeois Anonymous. Ever hear of it?'

The fearfulness of losing her one chance froze all the blood in her veins. 'Yes. I've heard of it.' What if they found out at B.A. that *she* had brought them to the editor's attention?

'I don't see why the editorial's so against them,' the office boy was saying. 'I like the idea. I think I'll join it. I don't go much for this middle class stuff myself. I'd like to be different! I always thought I was a lot different. I mean that I could be a lot . . .'

'Excuse me,' Lavinia said, stalking by him to get through the door. With the copy rolled tight in her hand, she headed straight for the elevators. But after pressing the call button, she let one elevator after another go by while she stood there scanning the editorial. She didn't actually have to; she could have predicted almost exactly what it contained.

'Another affront on the common-sense and on the ethical standards of the great American public . . .  
*Secret Organization* . . . so-called Bourgeois Anonymous

brought to light through the persistent investigations of the *Thought* editorial department . . . Bi-weekly meetings in sinister costumes . . . Available so-called volunteer aids sent out by the Despair switchboard. . .

‘What does it all amount to? Another place for the disaffected and the disenchanted self-deluders . . . Which means only that there is another outlet for aggressiveness toward America . . . Resolve themselves only into a clustering together of *misfits*; the unattractive girls looking for dates, the incompetent men taking out their frustration at being only square pegs in the well-oiled round holes of our social body . . . Parasites looking for means to subvert the moral structure . . . Looking for short cuts to undermine the high standards . . . *ANTI-American!* and *UN-American!*

‘They gather together and make confessions . . . hidden in anonymity . . . afraid to come out of the dark . . . The very opposite of the understanding, straight-thinking, clean-living . . . Another cancer in the vast body of our culture . . . Who can doubt the nefarious purpose . . . the detrimental influence . . . the outlandish intentions . . . Luring each other into more and worse effort . . . A cancer. A subversion . . . Misfits . . . Subversive . . . Misfits . . . *SUBVERSIVE. Danger. Danger.* Necessity for public action . . . For decency to be protected . . . for Our Young People to be kept . . . Write your Congressmen . . .

‘Actually a great money-making proposition . . . Headquarters in Dallas . . . Unearthed . . . Exposé . . . Tax-exempt . . . Million-dollar organization building . . . Their own printing presses . . . Network of agents throughout the country . . . Milking the innocent . . . So-called voluntary contributions . . . Leaders in Rolls Royces . . . Seducing the incompetent . . . frustrated . . . misfits . . . Vicious danger!

'But who can doubt that the essential health . . . the inexhaustible vigor of our stable social-body . . . We Americans of sturdy moral fibre . . . producing and consuming . . . Consider the excellent health of our economic condition . . . Consuming and producing . . . Ability to cast off every infection . . . foreign and domestic . . . Who would change our way of living . . . ? Who can fear that this is but a trivial . . . inconsequential . . . passing blight . . . unimportant . . . But on the other hand: every danger sign . . . Subversive! . . . Misfits! . . . Un-American . . . Stamp it out!

The disgust of it all gave Lavinia reckless courage.

She strode through the office of Warden's secretary toward the ante-room. 'Just a minute!' the officious girl shouted after her. 'You can't go in there! Do you have an appointment? Just a minute!' As Lavinia slammed the door behind her she heard: 'The Wheelwrights are with Mr Warden!!'

She was across the little room – the panelled windowless room in which she had discovered proof of Jeffrey's genius – in three strides, and through the large door on the other side directly into the inner sanctum: where Warden thought *Thought*.

It was elegant – with walnut furniture and a pale green rug that harmonized with the seventeenth-century tapestry on the far wall. Editor Warden stood leaning against the bookcase on her right. To her left stood the Wheelwrights, close by the large window, nearly silhouetted against the cold white winter light, turned three-quarters toward each other – the position necessary for seeing that neither one got away with anything that the other didn't know all about.

'How convenient!' Lavinia said, 'finding all of you together.'

'To what do we owe the honour of this interruption . . . ?' Warden began to drawl.

'The editorial about Bourgeois Anonymous.'

'Well, you needn't have come in like such a hell cat. The cheque is ready. I've just okayed it.' He moved toward the desk.

'What cheque?'

'The finder's fee for material that gets used in *Thought*. A hundred dollars. We always pay a hundred dollars for that sort of information. Leading to anything we publish.' He had picked it out of one of the folders in the upright file. 'Here you are.' He held it out toward her at the end of a six-foot arm.

Lavinia looked down at it and then directly into his face. 'Do you imagine I came here for *that*?' she asked contemptuously.

'Well, you do look a bit surprised by the whole matter.' His arm remained outstretched. 'What *did* you come here for?'

The deaf Arthur Wheelwright leaned sideways toward his low-volume wife. 'What did she say?'

Lavinia took the cheque in her two hands and then tore it apart – into six pieces and let them snowflake down to the rug. 'How revolting,' she said, looking from one face to another. 'How revolting you all are. With your smugness and your stupidity. How dare you take such a supercilious attitude towards Bourgeois Anonymous? How dare you make up such lies? Where do you get off to . . .'

'You've said quite enough.' Warden moved toward her, and she backed away to the door.

'What did she say?'

'She called you stupid,' Betty Wheelwright whispered hoarsely.

'I'm quitting. I'll get out for *good*. For better – to coin a phrase. I'm through with the lot of you.' She looked at the Wheelwrights. 'You deaf old bastard! And you dumb bitch! You can all go to Hell!'

'*What* did she say?'

Lavinia's heart pounded mercilessly.



Well, she had done it. For once in her life she had truly acted in a way that Bourgeois Anonymous would be proud of. If, as long as she lived, she never did any other thing of this sort, she would have this one action above all to remember. It was her National Velvet. It was like her being the first woman to swim the English Channel. She was the first woman to climb Mount Everest. The first woman secretary of the United Nations. The first woman on the moon. She had made it, as far as she was concerned; whatever 'it' was. This was the one certified public non-bourgeois, un-bourgeois, anti-bourgeois act of her life. So far!

She remained in her little office long after five, emptying drawers and sorting out her things. The whole floor of the building was silent but for the ringing of unanswered telephones. Not even a cleaning man was to be heard. The night had come early on this wintry day. In the dark and in the quiet of the moment, Lavinia estimated herself to be stronger and more independent than she had ever been before. Gradually, the explosion of feelings at liberation were settling. Here and now, at this clear-cut fork in the road, she was facing the test of seeing just how different she could be. It was no longer a matter of choice, not even a question of theoretical possibility. It had become a necessity. She felt released; she felt daring; and she calculated that she had enough money for at least two weeks during which she would see just how different she could be – before looking for another job.

But she felt convinced that she wouldn't be able to make out without the help of Bourgeois Anonymous.

At seven, she was finished. She went to the ladies' room for the last time and freshened up. In the office she looked at the two shopping bags filled with the things she would take home, she listened to see that no one was on the floor; then lifted the receiver, and dialed DESPAIR.

'Good evening,' a female voice whispered at the other end. 'This is the B.A. switchboard.'

'Good evening,' Lavinia began with an equally hushed voice. She gave her name and address and indicated that she'd been attending cell meetings 'for some time now' but that this was the first time she'd called on Despair.

'Yes . . .' The voice was touchingly sympathetic.

'I'm terribly in need of some help. Look: I'm on my way home right now. Would it be possible for you to send someone in about an hour?'

'Well, I just don't know what to say,' the compassionate voice began. 'Nothing like this has ever happened before. But during the past five hours there's been such a run on our staff that we're all booked up!' Lavinia immediately remembered the advance copies of *Thought* distributed that very afternoon.

'Booked up for how long?' Lavinia asked, terrified that she might have to wait for a week.

'Well, . . . now just let me check this area schedule . . . Yes,' the voice muttered. 'Taken; committed; reserved. Well! the earliest I can get anyone to your district will be eight p.m., Sunday evening.' She paused. 'Do you think you can hold out until then?'

'I'll have to,' Lavinia said bitterly. She measured the ironic cruelty of being *cut out* by all the editors and secretaries and clerks and frustrated-misfit-incompetents on the staff of Wheelwright Publications who had never heard of the organization before this day. It would be just at the time when *she* needed the help most.

'Very well. Someone will be there at eight on Sunday.' Then the switchboard operator lowered her voice still further. 'In the meanwhile, honey: why don't you take a hot bath, get into bed with a couple of fingers of Scotch and a movie magazine . . . It's only forty-eight hours from now. . . It'll be over before you know it. Lot's of luck! Stiff upper lip . . .' She was still giving the locker room pep talk as Lavinia put the receiver back on the phone.

Lavinia thought it extraordinary that in the midst of her own

misery during the next two days, she kept thinking of the hypochondriacal office boy who didn't 'go for that middle class stuff . . .'; who thought *he* ought to be different; who read the editorial in *Thought* and imagined that B.A. was appropriate for him. It began by her supposing that he was one of the people who had caused the run on the Despair switchboard but, once she had got over the panic of no one coming to see her, and then even got over her resentment at their being booked up two days in advance (so that she had to postpone her crisis session), she was simply bothered by the persistent presence of the office boy in her mind – with no particular thought centred on him at all. Only the awareness of his presence in her mind: as if her consciousness kept circling about the picture of him, simply wondering what reason her unconscious might have had for putting him forward at all.

She continued to tell herself that she couldn't comprehend how she survived those forty-eight hours, but the truth is that she took a hot bath, poured herself a few fingers of cognac, curled up on the day bed with half a dozen cheerful magazines – and slept most of the time.

And then it was over. It was a quarter of eight on Sunday night. She had survived. She looked slightly haggard – but only because she had eaten barely anything in two days; she was dressed neatly in her best black wool: she had next to no make-up on. The fire was lit in the fireplace. Only the soft lights were on. The main room was clean. Everything was in order. There was a new bottle of Scotch, two glasses, and a bucket of ice on the dining table.

The downstairs doorbell rang exactly at eight p.m. That frightened her more than anything she had anticipated. Was this the way to save her from middle class mediocrity? – by being menacingly punctual! She realized that the very thought showed how short her nerves were. She took a swift gulp of the Scotch before her apartment doorbell rang. And then he was there.

A man wearing pink-plastic-rimmed glasses; about fifty years old; with dyed brown hair – solidly brown, not a trace of grey even at the temples; wearing a Chesterfield with a little black velvet collar, and holding a black Homburg in his hand. He stood very upright and nodded slightly. The hall light framed him brightly in the doorway.

‘May I come in?’

‘You’re . . . ?’

‘B.A.’ was all of his explanation.

Lavinia instantly thought of the dentist she had always been taken to as a little girl; her parents still went to him – in the Bronx. It was the pin-striped suit and the student’s eyeglasses that did it.

The man tried to smile bravely. ‘You look tired,’ Lavinia said, as he took off his gloves, and placed his coat and hat, carefully, in the closet.

‘Well, I’ve never had a busier day since the switchboard opened.’ He raised his glasses to his forehead, pressed a thumb and forefinger against the bridge of his nose and shut his eyes for an instant. ‘Never a greater need,’ he said. ‘The demands on *every* volunteer this weekend have been unbelievable.’ He slowly studied the layout of the room and appeared to be guessing the degree of comfort that each chair offered. ‘May I sit here?’ he asked, pointing to the daybed.

‘Certainly.’ It seemed to her that she had seen him somewhere before or heard his voice . . .

‘You come and sit by me,’ he suggested, patting the mattress next to him.

‘Ah . . . well, yes, in a minute. I’ll get us something to drink. If you don’t mind, that is. Would you like a Scotch? Or cognac?’

‘Scotch is fine!’ He was beginning to thaw out. He got up and rubbed his hands together before the fire: he stretched and yawned. ‘You must forgive me,’ he said. ‘It’s been such a long day.’ He seemed so dignified, reserved, and polite.

Lavinia had rather expected a wild-eyed bohemian, or a horsey sort of woman, lithe-limbed and full of pep. His similarity to someone she knew bothered her; no, it wasn't the dentist. But the dyed hair disturbed her. He lit his pipe and asked, 'Do you mind?' when she brought the drinks back and placed them on the drum end table.

She looked him straight in the eye and said, 'Would it matter, now?'

'Ah! That's the spirit; see – you're not so bad off as you imagined.'

They smiled at each other. It felt like the beginning of any blind date.

They raised their glasses to each other and drank.

'Just what is your problem?' the man said. He stared at her.

Lavinia felt completely awkward and empty-headed. She began to stammer about 'Smith . . . and White Plains . . . divorced . . . conventional . . . ordinary . . . usual . . .' Then she started to get choked up.

Sitting next to her, he patted her on the back, saying, 'Easy now: take it slowly. Don't rush. It's sad. I know it's bound to be sad. I expect that. Don't apologize, and don't be shy.' (He rested his hand on her shoulder for an instant.) 'Just take it at your own pace. We have all the time that's necessary.'

'Your voice is very comforting . . . Would *you* talk for a few minutes?'

'Gladly.' (He had the technique of a virtuoso.) 'Look at it this way. As Aristotle says somewhere, it is more important to be a moral man than to be a good citizen. In its broader implications this means that it is more important to be your Best Self than to fulfil the cliché conventions of the society you live in. If he were alive today, Aristotle would be a member of Bourgeois Anonymous. What you are suffering from is not unique to you. We – all of us who are at all sensitive – are similar victims. The demands to be just like

everyone else . . .' The voice droned on; the rhetoric began to become perfectly familiar; the timbre of the sound itself seemed to be something Lavinia knew intimately. She felt foolish trying to place it until he concluded by saying: 'Would you mind closing that window? I realize it's open only a crack, but I hate the sound of street noises. Especially subways. That sound reminds me of. . . .'

'But you're The Teacher!' Lavinia exclaimed. 'In the Manhattan cell number four! I should have known it as soon as you began to talk.' She felt flushed, exalted. *Safe!* What better omen could she have hoped for? Saved! The Teacher himself was the one who had come when *she* called for help.

'That's true,' he said with modesty. 'But let's not allow that to get in our way.' Their hands touched as they both reached for their drinks simultaneously.

She felt so excited that she sat silent as a schoolgirl alone at last with the instructor of her 'crush'. What an honour. The Teacher himself. Wait till I tell Googie!

'You can tell me anything. Feel free. Begin anywhere. What has brought on this crisis in your life – making you know that your innermost being is threatened with extinction?'

'I quit my job.'

'But that's a very hopeful sign!' He smiled and patted her hand.

'I don't have any reason to believe I can make out as anything but a commercial artist – an illustrator.'

'We all have such fears . . .'

'I don't want to have to marry my beau.'

'Ah, ha! Now we come to the crux of it, I see. Why do you put it that way? "*Have to*" marry him?'

'Well, I feel as though I'm heading in that direction. I love him! I mean, well, I'm attracted to him sexually, and I respect him, and I admire him, and I enjoy him, and I'm enchanted by being in his company. You know what I mean – when I'm with him, I feel that he brings out the best that s

in me. As far as interpersonal relations are concerned, that is. But . . . on the other hand . . . I hesitate to marry him . . . because he's trying to take advantage of me.'

'Ah, ha! He wants to make love to you without being married.'

Lavinia stared at him with surprise. 'On the contrary. *He* wants us to get married *before* we have sex.'

'And this distresses you?'

'It's so bourgeois!'

The Teacher hesitated. 'Well . . . yes and no. It's more bourgeois in the breach than in the observance.'

Lavinia didn't get the point. 'But I don't want to have anyone take advantage of me!'

'Why not? Don't you want to take advantage of what's good in other people? – at least, what's good for you.'

'Are you trying to confuse me?'

'Not at all. I'm trying to help you make things clearer for yourself.'

'Well, then, this is the point. He's not trying to take advantage of what is good about me. He wants to take advantage of the fact that I'm bourgeois – through and through—' (she sobbed.) 'In other words, he wants to take advantage of what's worst about me.'

'But what difference does that make to you?'

'Well, I don't want to get married for the wrong reason!'

'But you don't *have to* get married at all.'

Lavinia felt terribly nervous and oppressed. She ran her fingers through her hair. 'Don't you see . . .' she began, 'that I have all the ordinary middle class built-in response mechanisms that make me feel I *ought to* get married. I personally, I mean *the real me*, deep down, doesn't want to get married. But I love him! I'd be willing to have an affair with him; but he won't have me on those terms.'

'Ah, ha! You mean *you* want to take advantage of *him*.'

Lavinia stared at him with uncertainty. 'Which side are you *on*?'

'I'm on the side of Bourgeois Anonymous. What we try to do is help people like you see what the situation actually is – so they can beat the bourgeoisie at its own game. It appears to me that in this case your confusion arises from the fact that you think there might be a right reason for getting married, and you imagine that your suitor wants to marry you for the wrong reason. But the truth (as we see it) is that – there is *no* right reason for getting married. Marriage is no more rational than love. We are not talking about medieval marriage for dynastic reasons, or high-finance marriage for economic reasons, or ritual marriage for religious reasons. Bourgeois marriage is just a hold-over from all those more primitive conditions. If you start out with that understanding, then you can say to yourself: *what's in it for me?*' He paused to wait for an answer.

'Well, I'll have the pleasure of being with him more of the time . . .'

'Yes. But in your heart of hearts, in your Best Self, you will always know that you can get even with him for making you legitimate. You can always deceive him; you can always be unfaithful to him . . .'

'That would be taking advantage of him in the worst way, wouldn't it.'

'Now you're getting warm.' He patted her hand again. 'Begin by forgetting all the bourgeois claptrap about being considerate and thoughtful and kindly, forget about the illusion of integrity. Face the fact that the essence of human relations is how to take as much advantage of others while being taken advantage of as little as possible yourself.'

'But that's so dishonest.'

The Teacher laughed. 'Now you're showing your middle class colours. Understand: I'm not suggesting that you marry this man. I'm just saying that *if* you can't help yourself, you should always feel that there is a way out. Part of the purpose of the Despair Switchboard is that you can call on someone like me for consolation.' His hand moved up her back,



slowly, and stroked her shoulder affectionately. The apprehension suddenly became crystal clear in her mind – he might try to make her. Her thighs went ice-cold, and the sweat began to break out along her hairline.

‘Pardon me, just a moment,’ she said gently, and disengaged herself. She went into the bedroom and quietly dialed Jeffrey’s number on the extension there. His telephone answering service responded. ‘Will you tell Mr Bowen to call Lavinia the second he gets back. It’s urgent! Please!’ She squared her shoulders and steeled herself to return. The Teacher was standing by the fireplace; his jacket thrown over one of the dining chairs.

‘Let’s begin again,’ Lavinia said.

‘Are these your paintings?’

‘Yes.’

‘You want to be an artist?’

‘Yes.’

‘So did I.’

‘What happened?’

They were standing in the middle of the room facing each other. ‘I couldn’t make it,’ he smiled. ‘Pity,’ she said.

‘I was talented, let me assure you!’ He sat down on the daybed again. ‘But this society isn’t organized to appreciate a variable talent. It approves only of narrow specialists. And I couldn’t specialize. I couldn’t “adapt”.’

‘But then what was *your* problem? Why are you a member of Bourgeois Anonymous?’

‘Inner conflict,’ he answered. ‘On the one hand, I was built so that *all* I wanted to live for was *pleasure*. On the other hand, I . . .’ he swallowed hard. ‘I was a do-gooder. I really wanted to be of some use. I wanted to help others. That was my bourgeois failing. That kept me from ever seeing anything through far enough. I kept running from one thing to another: starting out to do people good and then running out when I saw that I was about to be trapped by them into middle class mediocrity. But,’ his chest expanded with com-

fort, 'I've made my peace. I found that Bourgeois Anonymous enables me to be of service to others at the same time that I contribute to the collapse of the bourgeois system – by helping others become their Best Selves.'

'But then do you feel that you haven't achieved your own Best Self?'

'Oh, no. I have. This is the best I can do. Come sit with me again,' he smiled.

'No. Wait.' She stood behind one of the iron-frame chairs, leaning on it with both hands. 'Let me get something straight. Does this make you an Incast, a Bourgeois, or an Outcast?'

'Oh, that! That doesn't apply. Those categories matter only when you're concerned about making it in bourgeois society. Of course, I'm a little of everything. Materially speaking, I live like a middle class man. Spiritually, I'm an Incast; but socially – you know, from the point of view of the mediocre – naturally I'm an Outcast.' He paused. 'We're all a little of everything. Come sit by me.'

'Then what good is thinking about life with these ideas?'

'Well, they help those who are still trying to make it. Let's take you, for example. What good can Bourgeois Anonymous do you? It can support you (spiritually) during the time that your talent is tested, until you are a success in the bourgeois world – in which case you become a public Incast. Then you can be as bourgeois as you like, 't on your own terms. Or, if you don't make it, at least in your inner life you can always think of yourself as better anyway . . . Come sit with me!'

'You mean it's just a pretence!'

'No. It's a way of helping people during the period of transition.'

'Transition? From what to what?'

'From adolescent dreams to adult accommodation. It offers manna in the desert for the forty years of wandering from childhood's slavery to adult mastery. The master's

is either of your world or of your own self – or both. No matter what age you're at, as long as you want to transform yourself some way, B.A. can help you overcome the demands of the world to be like everybody else – during the metamorphosis. If you achieve what you want, you don't need it any more; if you don't – you always have us to call on . . .'

'But then it's the bourgeois world that puts everything to the test!'

'Of course! That's the public world. Actually, this is open to debate. I've had many an argument about it in the general sessions at the Bourgeois Anonymous Executive Council. But I've won my point – at least once,' he said proudly.

Lavinia glowered at him. 'It was your *hole-in-one*, wasn't it?'

'What?'

'Everything's competitive! If it isn't winning the Nobel Prize or a Miss America contest, it's the squirt gun game or "winning your point" at the Executive Council.'

'I don't see what you're driving at.'

'The whole business of living is competitive. And everyone is out to win the prizes and beat out the rest for the awards – the top honours, the big money. Is the whole world bourgeois? So . . . all that B.A. is good for is tiding you over until you become accepted by the bourgeoisie; and they'll find you acceptable if you're a success – any kind of success. The Million-Dollar-Sales-Club, the hole-in-one, the name on the door, the rug on the floor! Anything will do: as long as you're a success at it. Don't you, of all people, think that some things are worth doing – intrinsically worth while – even if you're a failure at doing them?' She was tearful with hot anger. 'What is it *all* about?' she demanded, painfully.

'Oh, that question . . .' The Teacher said in a blasé voice. 'I have the answer to that one. It's not *all* about anything. There is no all. That's just a semantical mirage.'

Lavinia felt herself growing hysterical with confusion. She began to laugh, and then said loudly, 'When you're in love – the whole world is bourgeois!'

He laughed with her for an instant. Then it was he who refreshed both drinks. They sat facing each other before the fire.

'Calm yourself,' he said. 'Look at it this way. Everything stinks. But each individual who has guts tries to carve a little private satisfaction out of the mess.'

'And the members of Bourgeois Anonymous give each other the strength to do it *a little more selfishly* than the rest!'

He patted her knee proudly. 'Now you're getting it! Cheers!' And he lifted his drink to toast her.

'Tell me more about how you've done it.'

'Well,' he leaned back comfortably and drew on his pipe. 'I've had my kicks!' He was quite prepared to tell her the whole story. 'My parents were very well off financially. My father owned a furniture company. Can you imagine anything more bourgeois? They were the dullest, most stuffy, rigid, insipid people alive. They wanted me to be a doctor, of course. I wanted to be an actor. Besides, they wanted me to marry the daughter of my father's partner. That would keep the money in the family. I did the classic anti-bourgeois thing – I ran away from home. I bummed around for a while, here in New York. It was tough but it was fun. I began to work in summer stock and finally got some jobs on Broadway. I lived around. I had a string of women – believe me! Sometimes I'd live in a penthouse on Park Avenue, and sometimes I'd live in a tenement, on 42nd Street (around where the U.N. building is now.)' Lavinia began to feel the hairs on the back of her neck go stiff. For the first time in her life she knew what it meant to feel her hair stand on end.

'I gave up acting when I got wild about folk music. Began giving concerts all over. Tried to; but it was no soon. There wasn't enough of an audience in those days. I tried

to talk it up. I wrote about it, and I wrote about my experiences of travelling around, *P.M.* offered me a job when the newspaper started; but that didn't last long. I'm not the kind to keep a steady job. And there were always women to foot the bill.' He fingered his striped silk tie. 'Even during the war; I was stationed in London and lived with one of the most beautiful women in the world. A Hungarian. What a woman! But there were others, believe me! London during the war . . .' He sighed. 'That was heavenly. Then when I got back . . .'

'Excuse me a moment.' Lavinia got up. She made herself walk slowly, hoping that he would think the bedroom was the bathroom. She was tingling so totally with the most extraordinary excitement that she had to walk stiffly, to control herself. Behind the bedroom door she flung her arms up into the air with a gesture of supreme achievement. Then she dialed Jeffrey's number again. The answering service had not heard from him. 'Tell him,' she whispered, 'that I must see him immediately. Immediately! It is of the utmost importance! A matter of life and death!'

The Teacher went on with his personal history. Every now and then, Lavinia tuned in on what he was saying. She heard such remarks as 'You're afraid of marrying for the wrong reason; but think of how much more frequently people fall in love for the wrong reason. No one wants to be taken advantage of; but everyone wants to be loved for the wrong reasons - like the millionaire who wants to be loved for *himself* . . .' She stared at him with a fixation. Now she could see the resemblance. In the structure of the head, in the shape of the nose. The dyed hair still bothered her. 'And so you see,' he continued, 'it's every man for himself.'

Lavinia interrupted: 'Now let me get this straight,' she said. 'You ran away from home. You were an actor. You wanted to live only for pleasure. You became a folk singer. You were a writer for *P.M.*, and since the Second World War you've been an executive of Bourgeois Anonymous.'

The Teacher assented to the whole inventory.

'During all of this time you lived with many different women.'

'That's right. Come sit by me.'

She did. Side by side on the daybed. They searched each other's face. 'Did you ever have an illegitimate child?'

He was obviously flattered by the question. 'As a matter of fact, I have had; two that I know of for sure.' He was stroking her arms and running his hands up her neck as far as the lobes of her ears. 'Why do you ask?'

Lavinia wanted to say: because I'm playing for time; but what came out was: 'It makes you all the more intriguing.'

'You find me intriguing . . .' he said softly and slowly.

'Just the kind of man one might have wanted for a father.'

He laughed. 'Then let me give you a *fatherly* kiss . . .' He held her head in both hands and tilted it back gently and set his lips firmly on hers.

'Well, I'll be goddamned!' Jeffrey shouted, standing in the doorway with the skeleton key in his fist.

'I dare say you will,' The Teacher remarked, wiping off the imagined lipstick with a handkerchief.

They both stood up. Lavinia rushed to Jeffrey, threw her arms around him and rested her head against his chest. 'Thank God you've come. You got my message.'

'The hell I got a message! I've been driving for six hours on disgusting icy roads trying to get here before it was too late to see you tonight, and what do I find? You - sitting here necking with a strange man. Christ, Lavinia,' he commented, 'he's old enough to be your father.'

'He's *your* father!' she replied, pulling her head back to face him, but still holding him in her arms. Then they separated and she shut the door behind him. 'I might have done (almost) anything to keep him here. I knew if I'd let him go there'd be no way of finding him. And I called your number - twice - you can check with your answering service. Believe me, darling. I have every reason to feel convinced

that he's the man you've been looking for. He's your father!

'How did you find him?'

'I called Despair. They sent him. And, Jeffrey, guess what he's The Teacher! From the cell meeting – last Sunday.'

'What's your name?'

'When?' The Teacher asked, putting his suit jacket back on and smoothing his hair.

'Anytime.'

'At the moment – Rawland Boheen.'

'Why do you keep changing your name?'

'It's only one more extension of the general principle for keeping young. I change my clothes; I change my residence; I change my accent sometimes, too. I've had my face lifted – here. . . .' (He drew his index finger along the length of his lower jaw.) 'Why not change my name? There is no permanence; there is only the moment. Live for the moment! Live differently in as many different moments as possible. If you are different – a different thing, a different person – then you must be called by a different name. Don't you have different nicknames in different personal relationships? I recognize my variability, therefore I call myself by different names. Does that clear things up?'

Jeffrey gave the date of his birth and his mother's name, and then – as openly as if he were saying 'Do you like Scotch?' – he asked, 'Are you my father?'

'Yes.' The Teacher looked hard at him for a moment and then knocked the dead tobacco out of his pipe and prepared a new bowlful. 'If all you've said about yourself is true, and if my memory doesn't deceive me, I should have to acknowledge that I am your biological father.'

'Well!' That was all Jeffrey could say.

'Will you have a drink?' Lavinia asked.

'Yes; I'm freezing. And, after all, this is quite an occasion. You can't imagine what this will mean in my psychoanalysis!'

Lavinia drew up one of the dining chairs and now all three of them sat before the fire, each with a fresh drink in hand.

'So you're in psychoanalysis,' The Teacher said sadly. 'Whatever for?'

'I've had a lot of psychological difficulty over my past,' Jeffrey began simply, '. . . and psychoanalysis promises to help me overcome that – by *accepting* it.'

'Pity!' his father said, drawing slowly on the pipe. 'Bourgeois Anonymous works on just the opposite principle. We try to get people to overcome their difficulties with the past by helping them to *reject* it. It's been eminently successful with me, for example. I never accept the past. I reject it continually; almost weekly.'

Jeffrey asked, 'Doesn't it leave you without a sense of character?'

'On the contrary. It gives me freedom. Heraclitus, now, may have said that character is one's fate; but if one doesn't believe in fate, then why be bound to character?'

'I don't understand you two!' Lavinia shouted. 'Here you are – father and son – meeting for the first time in your lives, practically, and you're jabbering away like a couple of college classmates at a reunion – picking up the old bull-session where you left off ten years before.'

'What would you prefer that we talk about?' The Teacher asked.

'*Yourselves!* Jeffrey – you've been looking for this man for years. Don't you have some questions you want to ask? You must have!'

'Well, as a matter of fact there are a few things I'd appreciate knowing about.'

'Shoot,' his father said comfortably.

'Why did you walk out on my mother after I was born?'

'Ah, that one . . .' the older man puffed on his pipe. 'It was like this. I couldn't bear being put upon that way. You



understand – the helplessness of the child! The constant demand for care: feeding and cleaning and all that sort of thing. And there was the problem of bringing you up, you know: educating you for what would be best. Since I hadn't found out what was best for myself at that time, how could I determine what would be best for you?'

'Educate me?' Jeffrey said. 'I was only four weeks old when you left.'

'Well,' his father smiled modestly, 'a man with intelligence and imagination anticipates that sort of thing. He knows what's coming. I couldn't bear the burden of looking forward to seeing you through colds and bruises and then chicken pox and measles; worrying about whether you'd get polio or t.b. or break an arm playing football; I couldn't invest the time and the energy to keep you from getting addicted to dope or becoming a sexual pervert or a juvenile delinquent. I could see – every time I looked at you in that crib – all the work that would be cut out for me. I knew how hard it would be. I couldn't bear the thought of becoming a disciplinarian and teaching you to say "please" every time I gave you an apple or a baseball bat, teaching you to speak different languages for different occasions, and how to keep from speaking at all under certain circumstances.' He sighed. 'I'd been through it all so recently myself that I wanted some time to enjoy myself before I began "creating" another life. I was aware of all the drawbacks, all the dangers, all the possible horrors. It was too much of a demand. I had better things to do with my time.'

'You just couldn't take the responsibility.'

'Exactly,' his father said, without the slightest strain of shame. 'I wasn't cut out for it. Not everybody is, you know. Well, don't look at me with such surprise, you two. I'm simply stating a fact. I didn't invent the facts. Some people just aren't cut out for it. *Most people*,' he snorted. 'But they go on pretending that they like children; that they like being parents – whereas they don't *like* it at all. Either they pretend

or they're so stupid that they can't anticipate the dangers – aren't aware of the whole catalogue of horrors that constitute the future of every infant – so they just *endure*.'

'How totally negative!' Lavinia said. 'You don't have to think of raising a child only as acting like a reform school principal. Didn't it ever occur to you that the main thing would be teaching *by example*? If you were a good, decent, honourable, exciting, imaginative human being, and you loved your wife (or, at least, the mother of your child) all you'd have to do was *be yourself* and you'd help the child become what you wanted of him . . .'

'But there was nothing that I wanted of him, or for him, or from him,' The Teacher replied. 'Besides, I didn't know what I was at the time – so how could I "be myself"? You're actually quite naïve, young lady, if you imagine that children learn very much by example. It's like going to school. Do you imagine that one learns very much in school – at any level? Of course not. There is only one kind of education; and everyone who knows anything knows that; and it's self-education. If you're not self-taught, you remain an ignoramus.'

Jeffrey asked, 'When you walked out on my mother and me – didn't you suffer guilt? Haven't you been ridden by guilt ever since?'

The Teacher laughed. 'Never! The whole experience was too rewarding. I got too much out of it. It altered my whole outlook; and it gave me a vocation. I can never be too grateful to myself for having done that. You see – once I'd abandoned you, I began looking at every human being in a new light. I couldn't help it. I found myself actually peering at strangers, thinking – "He, too, or she, also, was an infant, someone's issue, somebody's baby; and as a helpless, defenceless, dependent little pink bundle – cuddled, fondled, fed, nursed, rocked to sleep, held in the lap, loved!" You see: only then did it suddenly occur to me that every living human being is somebody's child; that for everyone I should

ever come in contact with – anywhere, anytime – the sales-girl, the barber, the man who would give me a job or the man I might employ, the women I might make love with or the hat check girl at a nightclub – every single solitary breathing beast of a human being is somebody's child; and somebody once brought that infant home in his arms or her arms and prayed for it – hoped for it, wished it well, put out money for its wellbeing, taught it (as well as it could), clothed it, and had its teeth straightened, *wished*, you understand?, invested it with wishes for happiness! It was a gigantic vision! You understand?

'From then on I could never confront a human being without wondering – "What am I doing to this person in the light of those wishes of his (or her) parents?"' He laughed again. 'You see, I became a member of the secret conspiracy of parents. But it would never have occurred to me if I had stayed with you and your mother. I would have been too busy taking care of the two of you to *understand* that. One either has the experience *or* one has the understanding; one rarely has both.'

'Well, I should think,' Jeffrey began, 'with that particular understanding you would have wanted to return to my mother and me.'

'I thought about it once or twice, but it was Plato who kept me from making the mistake of treating only my blood child as my own child. He had the supremely generous idea of keeping the parents and children *of the élite* from knowing their actual paternity, so that all of the parents felt equally responsible for all of the children, and all of the children were equally respectful to all of the parents.' He smiled. 'I have practiced this attitude ever since I left your side.' He actually patted Jeffrey's knee. 'You see, if I had returned to you I would have known who my actual child was. But, as I worked it out, there was always the chance that anyone of your age might be my son. This way – I have been a father to hundreds of young men, instead of being

limited to just you. Would you have prevented that if you had been given the chance?' he asked.

Jeffrey thought about it for a little while. 'Well, since I don't know what it would have been like to have had a father just for myself, I'm really not in a position to choose.'

'Precisely my opinion. And since I don't know what it would have been to have had just one child – in the conventional sense – I should have to say that: I would do it all over again just as I did then, if I had a second chance.' He sipped his watered Scotch with complacent self-satisfaction.

'In other words,' Jeffrey said, 'it was never a matter of your liking or disliking me . . .'

'Not in the least. I just couldn't stand the noise! Don't look so shocked, you two. It isn't given to everyone to bear the pains of raising infants. I'm good with adults. Well, almost-adults. I know perfectly well what I've become; I'm a Youth Leader. But I'm not a nursemaid. I can't endure the weeping and wailing of a baby. And if I couldn't bear it, then it wasn't fair to expect it of me. In order to raise a child, one has to have a special kind of strength to watch someone else suffer. Taking that suffering into myself was not a power I commanded. I'm too sympathetic. I wouldn't have been any good at it. To this day I can't stand the sound of a baby crying. It's a great weakness; but, as you see, I've made the best of it . . .'

Lavinia said bluntly, 'You weren't on the way to giving me your fatherly treatment when Jeffrey arrived, were you . . . ?'

The Teacher drew on his pipe meditatively. 'When I go out on a Despair call, I have to try, almost in the blinking of an eye, to calculate the needs of the party who puts in the call. Sometimes I miscalculate; not often, you understand, but sometimes. In your case, Lavinia, I don't think I was on the wrong track . . . It's all a question of what one perceives as the greatest need of the immediate situation. Can any "father" do more than that?'

Embarrassed, Lavinia got up and started to make coffee at the pullman kitchen. Over her shoulder she said, 'Don't you want to ask your son anything about himself?'

'That's a good thought,' The Teacher said. 'What *has* become of you, young man?'

His son began to tell him. Lavinia brought coffee by the time he was through. 'Don't forget to tell him about your article in the next issue of *Thought*.' The second she had finished saying that, she felt her arms go cold with shame and her heart begin to thump.

'... it will be out this coming Wednesday,' Jeffrey concluded.

'I'll look forward to seeing it; although I don't mind saying I rarely read that bourgeois brain-washing magazine.'

'I have an advance copy of it here, now. . . .' Lavinia began. And then she added, 'It also has an editorial in it against Bourgeois Anonymous.'

'*What?* May I see it?' The Teacher demanded. When it was in his hands he read it through twice. He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. 'I can't believe it,' he muttered. 'Hideous. Appalling.' He was so ~~ann~~erved that he knocked over the coffee cup on the floor as he stood up. 'I'll have to go . . . Who, I say, *who* could have gone to them . . . who would have told . . . what disastrous . . .?'

'I happened to mention . . .'

'You?' he bellowed. 'You, of all people. Why, Bourgeois Anonymous was a mother to you. More a mother than you could ever have had. A father to you . . .' He ranted as he pulled his gloves on. Jeffrey helped him into the Chesterfield. They shook hands. 'Pardon my glove. It's been a pleasure meeting you, young man,' he said; then turning from the doorway, his homburg in one hand and the copy of *Thought* rolled up in the other, he faced Lavinia. He stared at her pale face (his own cheeks flushed apoplectically) and

said: 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth is the ingratitude of a child!' He slammed the door behind him, as Lavinia and Jeffrey, each for radically different reasons, began to laugh hysterically.

## Chapter Ten

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WHEN they had calmed down and then hugged and kissed – Lavinia was shocked to see Jeffrey reach for his coat and get ready to leave. ‘But I have so much to tell you about. . . .’ she started to say.

‘You must bear with me, darling,’ he said. ‘I’ve got a tremendous amount to talk with you about, too – all that work up at Cambridge this week; marvellous news! – but, Jesus, honey, don’t you see how important this is to me? It’s only midnight. I’m going to run over to my analyst’s. Don’t you realize how important this is? At last – I’ve found my father! I can’t thank you enough, love; I really can’t.’ He was flushed with excitement. ‘But I’ve got to run right over to his place to . . . to . . . see what it means!’

‘I quit my job.’

‘That’s great, honey . . .’ his voice stood suspended just as his hand stopped in mid-air short of the doorknob. ‘You what?’

‘I quit my job.’

It took him a few seconds to make his interpretation and then he started to smile. Stretching out both arms to embrace her, he said, ‘You trying to tell me the answer is “Yes”?’

‘No,’ she said brusquely. ‘Is that all you can think of?’

'You'll have to admit it's a pleasant thought. But I suppose I couldn't take that much good luck in one night.'

'Quitting the job had nothing to do with you.'

'That's how much you know about the unconscious, baby. But look, I've really got to go now. I'll call you tomorrow.' He kissed her briskly once more before leaving, and added, over his shoulder, as he started off down the hall - 'Don't do anything rash.'

What does he imagine I might do? Lavinia asked herself - commit suicide because he had to leave in a hurry?

She stalked about the room in frustration and petulant testiness. What an evening! What had happened? She telephoned the Despair switchboard for help, and, out of it - The Teacher got advance warning that *Thought* had an anti-B.A. editorial coming out; Jeffrey found his father and rushed off to his analyst; and Lavinia ends up alone without a job and without advice, but with the dishes to wash. What a lot of help! 'I must call on Despair more often!' she muttered.

The telephone rang, and her heart bounded up with excitement. But it was Googie asking, 'Do you by any chance know where Vincent is?'

'No, Googie; I haven't the faintest idea. What made you think I would know?'

'I couldn't think of anyone else to call.'

'Oh, Googie . . . don't sound so sad. It isn't all that bad.'

'It is! I haven't seen him since this noon. Twelve hours! Where can he be?'

'Don't cry, Googie, please! Get hold of yourself. It isn't as though you were married.'

'That's the worst part of it. This way he doesn't *have* to come home unless he wants to . . . unless he loves me . . .' She was sobbing violently now.

'Googie, don't you want to come back here - for the night, at least?'



'Oh, no, Lavinia. That would be giving up without a fight. No. Thank you, Lavinia; that's awfully thoughtful of you; but I couldn't. I'll stick it out longer . . . I've got my pride. I've got to save face.'

Lavinia said: 'It looks as though the only way to *save face* in this life is to wear a mask.'

Googie laughed. 'Is that a paradox? Well, it sounds cute, anyway. I'll think about it. Thank you for making me feel better, Lavinia. Bless you, Livy! That reminds me: how are *you* getting along?'

'I'm all right.'

Instantaneously with hanging up the receiver, Lavinia realized she was *all right*. Maybe it was the sudden awareness that Googie was worse off than she that put everything in proper perspective. Maybe it was the awareness of Mr Bones' need to run to his analyst or The Teacher's new-found worries about B.A. – but all of these together made Lavinia think of herself as lighthearted, with barely a problem in the world compared with the people she knew. She whistled happily as she washed out the glasses and the coffee cups, put them away neatly, emptied out the ashtray, and sponged clean the table tops. When she opened the window wide for a few minutes to air out the room, ~~she~~ looked down into Sheridan Square with the calm comfort of feeling that she had *come through*. Somehow she *belonged*. Life was not going to throw her. Life was the horse to be ridden, broken, saddled, and enjoyed. Life wasn't going to turn her into a dray with a yoke on her neck. Somehow – she neither understood exactly how nor felt the need to understand – she was in the driver's seat.

She slept until noon. When she got up and lazily bathed, powdered and perfumed herself, she dressed in her new negligée – the pale blue with lace like bunches of white lilacs, as though it were a foregone conclusion that Jeffrey would call on her that evening. The apartment was silent;

Lavinia had not bothered to turn on the phonograph. Snow fell silently past the windows. She manicured her toenails, and then she went back to reading the cheerful magazines she had bought at the beginning of the weekend. The main room was cozy even without the logs burning in the fireplace. When the telephone rang, she knew that everything was all right – regardless of what would happen. If Jeffrey said that he was on the way up: that would be all right. And if he said he couldn't see her that night: that would be all right. If she did any painting that would be all right; but if she didn't, that would be all right, too. And whether or not she got a new job within two weeks – all, all of it, would be all right.

'How are you?' Jeffrey asked.

'All right!'

'You certainly sound chipper. I'm lousy.' He sounded as if both nostrils were stuffed with cotton. 'Got a head cold. I'd better trade in this sports model. I need a more "solid" car.'

'All right.'

'You're very agreeable. Look, darling, we can't get together tonight. My analyst is going to give me a lot of extra hours this week. We're going to try to break through with this new info. You understand?'

'Right.'

'What's the good word for tonight?'

'The word? Well, I'd say – if you want to be an *in*cast in this life, and save face, you have to wear a mask . . . even if that's as unlikely as a blond Chinese.'

He laughed. 'Quite a speech! Beautiful. Oh, that reminds me. Have you seen today's newspapers?'

'No. I haven't been out of the house.'

'Talk about masks! The afternoon papers are full of the apotheosis of it all. You've heard of cops dressed as women or as dope peddlers, haven't you?'

'Yes.'

'You've heard of gangsters dressed as cops?'

'On television.'

'Well, in real life too. What happened yesterday is that a bunch of cops dressed as female dope peddlers arrested a gang of grand larceny boys dressed as cops! Isn't that a riot? In Columbus Circle. Last night.' He roared with laughter. 'You can't tell the cops from the robbers without a scorecard. Do you get it, love? How can you ever worry again about wearing a mask in this life - when . . .'

'I get it,' she said.

'Will you marry me?'

'I'm thinking about it.'

'I've been thinking a lot about it too. Of course, I don't want you to marry me for the wrong reason.'

Lavinia cocked her head. 'Like what?'

'I mean because you're out of a job.'

Now it was her turn to laugh. 'Do you think that's a good bourgeois question?' she asked.

'Well, I've got to get over to the analyst's now. I'll call tomorrow. Goodnight, darling.'

Her laughter evaporated gradually. Marrying for money happens among the bourgeois probably more than among the prols or among the aristocrats, of course. It spoiled her sense of well-being to think about it.

She took off the negligée and dressed in blue jeans and a sweater, seated herself at the dining table in front of the drawing pad, - and stared at it, without moving a muscle. In the end she went to sleep without having made a mark.

On Tuesday, Googie called to say that everything was okay between Vincent and her. He had got caught in a poker game and didn't come home until 3 a.m. on Monday. 'You can't think these things through in advance,' Lavinia heard herself saying. 'All you can do is drift with the tide; but stay afloat on your own raft. You are secure on your raft, aren't you, Googie?'

'I am?'

On Wednesday, Lavinia called *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Mademoiselle*, and *The New York Times* to say she was looking for free-lance work as a fashion illustrator. On Thursday *Vogue* called back for an interview. She said she'd be in to see them with her portfolio the following Monday. Jeffrey called Thursday night – his nose stuffed, his voice sombre – and asked if he could come over.

The first thing he said as he walked into the apartment was: 'My analysis is over.'

'Well, why look so downcast? I thought this is considered a great moment of joy! *Congratulations!*'

'Yes . . . as a matter of fact, it is; but, it's so new. You know – it just this minute happened. I'm a little dazed.'

'Sit down. Have you had any dinner? Do you want a drink?' They sat down facing each other in front of the fireplace. 'Have some aspirin. Have a hot toddy? Did you take any cold pills?'

'You will . . .' Jeffrey began, 'if we get married, that is, you will take good care of me?'

Lavinia smiled. 'If we do, or if we *don't* – as long as I know you, I will take as good care of you as I know how to. Won't you do the same for me?'

'I'd take better care of you than I know how!'

They kissed. 'But not on the lips. I don't want you to catch my cold.'

'Jeffrey: there is something impossible about a love scene with a hospital patient. Love is only for the healthy! Let's just be friends tonight.'

'Lavinia . . . my . . . analysis is . . . *over!*' He blew his nose.

'Well! How did it happen?'

'The analyst can't do anything for me any more. He says he's done as much as possible – in my case.'

'Finding your father was the decisive factor?'

'Yes,' he said sadly. 'You see – I have a Madjekeewis Complex.'

'Mud-gee-key-wiss?' she hissed. 'What in God's name is that?'

'Well, I told you my analyst isn't a strict Freudian.'

'But you didn't say he doesn't speak English.'

'Oh, his English is all right. He's trying to improve on Freud.'

'We all have our dreams. . . .'

'You've read Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, haven't you?'

'Probably not since I was twelve.'

'My analyst said there's a lot of sentimental trash in Longfellow; but *Hiawatha* is a masterpiece.' He coughed.

'Jeffrey: forgive my impatience, but what does any of this have to do with you?'

'I'll get to that. You see, my analyst says he's correcting an error in Freud's descriptive theory. He says it's essentially a poetic error. Freud knew pretty well what he wanted to express, but unfortunately, Freud wasn't well-read enough, so he chose an inexact image for the complex he understood well enough. And that misled him.'

'Who the hell is Mudjekeewis?'

'Hiawatha's father.'

'You're kidding,' she laughed. '"By the shores of Gitche-Gumee . . ."'

'Now, my analyst says that Hiawatha is a more universal and precise symbol of what Freud is talking about than Oedipus is. The primitive Indian fable is closer to the truths of basic psychology than the sophisticated Greek tragedy.' Jeffrey brought a page of notes out of his jacket pocket and looked over single-entries like the words 'eternal', or 'knowing', and 'struggle'.

'What is it Freud wished to express?' he asked. 'That every man knowingly loves his mother and wishes to destroy his father. Now you can begin to see the fallacy of using Oedipus as the symbol. Oedipus killed his father for entirely irrelevant reasons; not knowing that he was his father.'

Oedipus loved and married his mother and had children by her – but not knowingly, not with the awareness that she was his mother. He didn't love her because she was his mother. Would this imply that any man who had not known his mother from birth might, on reaching manhood and meeting her in ignorance of their relationship, carry on a romantic affair with her? That's not what the good Dr Freud meant to say. Of course not. The wrong symbol put too many words into his mouth.

'What my analyst figures Freud meant – is better and more beautifully symbolized by Hiawatha. It's more profound. It's more precise. First of all, Hiawatha's mother is lost to him through his birth. Is that not the true exclusion of this relationship? – that a woman cannot become one's lover when she has borne him? Wenonah, his mother, was made known to Hiawatha only through legend, through the memory of his grandmother, Nokomis, and he longs for her and loves her only as the woman forever lost to him – which is more exactly what Freud tried to express.

'Second,' Jeffrey continued, consulting his notes, 'Hiawatha is outraged by the discovery that Mudjekeewis betrayed his mother; and he sets out to destroy his father. You understand – he's never seen his father before. But here is the universal symbol. No son ever really sees his father. The adolescent, scandalized by the realization of his father's wanton cruelty toward his mother, longing to avenge her, wishes to kill, consciously plots to discover and then destroy his father.' Jeffrey intoned:

'Patiently sat Hiawatha,  
Listening to his father's boasting;  
With a smile he sat and listened.  
Uttered neither threat nor menace,  
Neither word nor look betrayed him;  
But his heart was hot within him,  
Like a living coal his heart was.

'So, then, the son provokes Mudjekeewis into a battle which endures for many days and covers great stretches of land, for *they are partly gods* as well as men, you understand. Here is the son stalking the father with intent to revenge through murder; no arrogant Oedipus killing an unknown older man on the spur of the moment – because of a traffic jam.' He continued:

' "Hold" at length cried Mudjekeewis,

"Hold, my son, my Hiawatha!

" 'Tis impossible to kill me.

"For you cannot kill the immortal.

"I have put you on this trial,

"But to know and prove your courage;

"Now receive the prize of valour!"

'There you have it!' he shouted – 'here's the essence of this beautiful symbol – the father is immortal, invincible, this is what Freud learned! The experience of the father, one's own particular father, is in every man's life indestructible and the memory of that experience is immortal. The only release is the satisfaction of struggling, is the freedom that comes through struggle.' He leaped into another passage.

'Homeward now went Hiawatha;

Pleasant was the landscape round him,

Pleasant was the air above him.

For the bitterness of anger

Had departed wholly from him,

From his brain the thought of vengeance,

From his heart the burning fever.

'He had made his effort to revenge his mother and destroy his father; he had met him, struggled with him, and survived; which is all a man can hope to accomplish before he's able to see the landscape round him, before he can look for Minnehaha, and ask for her hand in marriage.' Jeffrey

was exalted, radiant, now; he was all smiles. Suddenly he sneezed and then blew his nose. His eyes watered. 'Terribly sorry,' he added.

'Fantastic!' was all Lavinia could say. 'Fantastic.'

'No. It's all reasonable.'

'What exactly does this have to do with your finishing your analysis?'

'The whole point is that I've discovered now that I can't change the past. I've met my father. I've realized that no revenge can alter the facts. The facts are that I didn't have a father; he was no earthly good for me. This man who was my biological father was of no social use to me. But by his absence. Well, I have to accept that. I can accept the past . . . now that I've met the man: and didn't like him!'

'And this means you don't have to go on with your analysis?'

'Yes. You see: I had always thought that if I met my father I might locate some sort of key to changing the past. I'd have some kindly understanding that would put the whole thing in a different light. Or: I'd have the power to bring about a change in him. But it hasn't; neither happened. The simple truth is that *he's the bastard; not I.*'

'But how does this contribute to your long-range purpose for going into analysis – in order to become bourgeois?'

'It fits perfectly. A bourgeois boy has to find out that his father is a bastard before he can grow up.'

'And does your analyst feel that you've grown up now?'

'Yes! Besides, I happened to make a decisive statement. It was all very dramatic. As soon as I said it, he shut his notebook and stood up. I stood up; he offered to shake hands with me for the first time; he said, "We've reached the end of our search together . . . you've made it!"'

'What was it you said?'

'Oh, I couldn't tell you.'

'Oh, come on! You can tell me anything.'

'No. I'd be too embarrassed.'



'A fine way to start a marriage . . . I mean, *if* we get married . . .'

'You promise not to take offence?'

'I promise. Go ahead now, tell me.'

'I said you had quit your job and that . . . well, maybe . . . now you would consider marrying me for my money; you know what I mean – for financial security.'

Lavinia laughed nervously.

'My analyst felt I had passed the final test. You see, now that I can get over taking my father seriously, I was free to think like a truly middle class man. And this was a spontaneous, gratuitous, bourgeois thought if there ever was one. He tells me that there's almost no middle class male who doesn't feel, in his heart of hearts (no matter how deeply he's in love with the girl he wants to marry) that if she's willing to marry him, it may be only for financial security. So – you see – once I'd passed that test, I mean – once that thought came to me – he felt that there was no further need for me to be in his care. His analysis has done all it could for me. I can take it from here on my own now.

'There were two basic points,' he explained. 'First, in order to be bourgeois, I'd have to understand that I could never please my father. Nothing I did could matter to him. He didn't walk out on me because he disliked me, and he wouldn't in any sense "come back" to me because he approved of anything I did. He's just too completely self-centred to have any reasonable estimate of me, under any circumstances. When a middle class boy discovers that about his father, he begins to grow out from under the shadow.'

'What was the other basic point?' Lavinia asked.

'Well, that's a little harder to say. If I understood him correctly, he meant that even if you were willing to marry me mainly because of financial security – that's all right too. I'd have to live with the fact that your reasons don't have to agree with mine – as long as we both get what we want.'

'Interesting,' she said. 'Though not ideal.'

'What is?' he asked with a smirk.

'You are!' she laughed, plopped herself in his lap and buzzed a wreath of kisses all around his face.

She told him that she could probably support herself by doing free lance illustration, and that he should ignore the thought of her marrying him for 'financial security'. But she was not ready yet to make up her mind. He agreed to take her to the Bourgeois Anonymous meeting that Sunday night. She agreed to a hot midnight supper at his apartment afterward.

In the few days between, Lavinia's moods roller-coastered: manic-depressively. Either she was a balloon – without substance and without attachment – let loose in the atmosphere, wandering, exposed, less lost than simply without destination and without character; or she was a land of rocks waiting for Jeffrey to 'water' her, waiting for him to turn her into a rock garden. Waiting. Drifting without weight, or waiting; heavy with earth . . . unfertilized. She waited.

On Sunday evening, Jeffrey drove her to the cell meeting. In all simplicity – because neither of them had thought about the effects of the editorial – they were completely amazed to discover the crowd pouring into the brownstone just off Fifth Avenue. It took them four minutes to get up the front steps, moving one step at a time. And once they had squeezed into the vestibule they were crushed nearly breathless by the mob – howling at the tops of their voices – pressing for entrance into the meeting room. No one was fitting cloaks on or leaving an overcoat in the hall. The pointed masks were not being put on at the doorway. Chaos and bedlam had broken loose. The assembly room, which they reached as part of the flotsam and jetsam of the flood, was peopled to bursting. The bridge chairs all remained folded against the walls and people stood everywhere, their coats on,

their faces unmasked – the length and breadth of the greenish lighted room. The noise sounded more in character with an overcrowded Manhattan cocktail party than with the decorum of a Bourgeois Anonymous cell meeting.

When the great gong sounded, only half of the people in the room knew enough to stop jabbering; and the quantity of bodies and the winter clothing in the building quickly quieted the reverberations and made the gong sound less impressive than ever before. Gradually, Lavinia and Jeffrey were able to make out a voice over and above the buzz and hum of the crowd.

It was the voice of The Teacher – Jeffrey's father – although no one stood at the lectern (invisible in the mass).

'This is a recorded announcement,' it said, and kept repeating it. 'This is a recorded announcement. This is a recorded announcement. The Executive Committee of Bourgeois Anonymous anticipated the overflow crowd that might gather here tonight. We had been informed in advance that the inflammatory editorial in *Thought* would appear. We, too, have our spies in high places.'

How like Warden's opportunism, Lavinia thought.

'This is a recorded announcement,' the voice continued. 'It is merely to say that, under the circumstances, discretion is the better part of valour. The Manhattan cells of Bourgeois Anonymous will now be disbanded.'

There was a wail of disbelief and disappointment in the room.

'The Manhattan cells of Bourgeois Anonymous will have to be dissolved in their present forms . . . for the moment, of course. So that we can shake down and regroup our forces. Publicity will kill our usefulness for the moment. There are some things that can be accomplished only in privacy or only in small groups. Large-scale publicity destroys them. But we will fight on! We will begin again from the grass roots. We know where we are needed and gradually, like a hydra, we will grow two cells in every

instance where there had been one before. We will expand our facilities, so that those who are worthy of our services can be served, whereas those who are only sensation-seekers and publicity-hounds will fall by the wayside. We will be here for those who need us. For tonight – this is all!

‘Please leave the building in an orderly fashion. The less attention you draw to our organization, the better. Don’t call us. We’ll call you. For now: remember only – the true Spirit is on Your Side. You, too, can overcome being bourgeois. Don’t despair. Fight the good fight . . .’ The last of his lines was lost in the bedlam as the crush at the door eliminated a dozen listeners while more than a dozen took their places. The gong sounded weakly.

The Teacher’s voice began again. ‘This is a recorded announcement . . . This is a recorded announcement . . .’

‘Then . . . it’s all over,’ Lavinia said sadly. She actually found herself patting tears away from her right eye. Jeffrey switched on all the lights in his living room and started the radio on a station that played classical music.

‘Yes – obviously for a while, at least. Though why not believe the announcement? They’ll probably regroup. Do you imagine you’ll want to go on attending sessions . . . ?’

Lavinia did not answer. ‘I really can’t eat a thing, Jeffrey,’ she said. ‘Let’s just have a drink for a while . . .’

In quiet reasonableness, they found themselves sitting opposite each other across the centre of the table in the middle of the room. It gave them the air of sitting down to a conference, as one might with a business associate or in a doctor’s office. ‘“Some things can be accomplished”,’ Lavinia quoted The Teacher, ‘“only in privacy or in small groups . . .”’ Jeffrey nodded agreement, and poured them each a Scotch. ‘Odd,’ Lavinia said, ‘that that remark sticks with me so! Somehow I think it’s one of the truest things I ever heard at any of the B.A. meetings.’

‘But the oddest thing of all is the idea of banding together

in a group to help you become more of an individual independent of groups!

'Well, everyone has to be the member of some group,' Lavinia said quietly. 'Unless you mean to be a genuine hermit.'

'Exactly!' Jeffrey exclaimed. 'Which is why the argument for wearing a mask is so sound.'

'It's so wearying,' Lavinia sighed, took a sip of the drink, and rested her head on her hand. 'Trying to figure it all out, I mean. But that is the goal we were all educated to, isn't it? I mean – the idea is: if you're an artist or an intellectual, what you're trying to do is to "figure it all out!"'

'How presumptuous! Artists and intellectuals,' Jeffrey sneered. 'Figure it all out . . .' he echoed with sarcasm. 'One in ten million offers a theory or a vision that pretends to *figure it all out*. And what does that amount to? We end up by explaining him away with some theory or other of mental aberration. What I really respect is the modesty of the bourgeoisie that works on the basis of a truly tragic pragmatism. The bourgeoisie that knows it doesn't understand everything; can't figure it all out; has no gigantic solution; offers no fanaticism; but does the job of keeping the world on its wheels. It's that hidden secret, that concealed question mark in the middle of everything they do – realizing that they don't know what the hell it's for or *why* and not needing to stop the world while they sit down to examine it . . . just as long as they keep the awareness a secret – they're tragic. When they pretend they know, or pretend that there isn't any question, that's when they become self-righteous stuffed-shirts. That's when they turn to stone.'

'And isn't that what happens most of the time?'

'I'm not at all sure. I frankly can't believe that most people – I mean most of the so-called bourgeoisie – don't realize that the world they live in is a world of only surface calm; but that underneath – just a fraction of an inch under the surface – from there on it's wild! It's volcanic, it's lawless,

it's dog eat dog, it's every passion ready to tear every other passion to bits; it's poverty and disease and corruption and fear – a universe where all things are possible; there is no order, no rules, no propriety; and nothing, but nothing, is ever “*nice*”!

‘I think you give them too much credit.’

‘I think you give *us* too little,’ he answered.

‘Us?’ she asked. ‘Why *us*?’

‘Because we’re part of it. We’re smack in the middle of it. Holy Christ!’ he threw his arms up excitedly, ‘I haven’t had a chance to tell you the best part!’ He began to look through the drawers of the teak filing cabinet at the edge of the table. ‘I have it all here. This is the results of the work I did up at Cambridge, I’d nearly forgotten to tell you. This has been such a hectic week. Here it is!’

She straightened herself up and lined up her chair with the table, neatly and intensely, like a devoted school-girl.

‘It seems to me that your major concern with middle class mediocrity is all on the surface of the surface. You’re worried over manners; etiquette; forms of behaviour. You seem to think they wear you out, chip away your substance. But I think you’re not addressing yourself to the essence of the problem at all. Every class has its conventions. Even The Teacher of the B.A. cell demanded the discipline proper to that group. But etiquette isn’t the heart of anything – it’s just a pale mirror. The heart is what makes the morality of the group work. Now,’ he continued, putting his papers in order, but not looking at them carefully yet, ‘what I *want* is the kind of morality (that justifies the bourgeois etiquette) that *you* have by second nature. And, honey, you have no idea of just how rare that is!’

‘What the devil are you driving at?’

‘This is what I did up at Cambridge.’ He looked over the pages now. ‘For a long while I’ve been categorizing the etiquette and the morality of the bourgeoisie and of the

lower class. I worked out a series of four co-ordinates: distinguishing the behaviour from the morality that explains the behaviour. It was like any other problem in mathematical statistics, simulating any given reality. The method was to determine how many times certain kinds of actions occur – relative to the class-population; how often each class participated in certain forms of behaviour and why. For example: does a lower-class male get married because he's knocked-up a girl at the rate of three per 100, relative to a middle class boy at what rate? The next step was to compile profiles of known styles of justification for such actions – like abandoning a marriage; cheating on income tax; belief in religion; patriotism; devotion to intelligence; betraying ideals of what your Best Self could be, etc. I've been gathering the information from the sociologists for years. That's all they're doing, you know. Just supplying us mathematicians with the data.' Jeffrey was glowing with enthusiasm now.

He went on: 'Well, then, the procedure was to compare the two sets of sociological profiles, using Bayes' theorem: if  $q_1, q_2, \dots, q_n$  are a set of mutually exclusive events, the probability of  $q_r$ , conditional on prior information  $B$  and on some further event  $p$ , varies as the probability of  $q_r$  on  $B$  alone times the probability of  $p$  given  $q_r$  and  $B$ ; namely:  $P(q_r/pB) \propto P(q_r/B) P(p/q_rB)!$

'Really?' Lavinia barked out a laugh. 'You don't expect me to follow that, do you?'

'Oh; sorry, darling. Didn't mean to bore you. I just didn't want you to think I made this up. I really did work it out. On the IBM 7090 computer at M.I.T. What I did was feed all the statistical profiles into the computer and got the score.'

'I would like to know the score,' she smiled.

'Well, the results show that for all practical purposes – *there is no bourgeoisie!*'

'What?'

'If you recognize that the essence of the morality of a genuine bourgeoisie is devotion to a career, preferably a profession, rather than a job simply held in order to earn a living; related to a family as a stable stronghold of love, affection, education, and recreation; in which mutual respect and tolerance makes for long lasting participation in a stable community through natural friendship rather than transitory business associations – then statistically speaking: practically no such group exists in this country. The morality of the so-called middle class has evaporated under our noses; while the etiquette of the middle class, simplified, rigidified, and made cheap by commercially-mass-produced means has coated the lower class like a lava-flow.'

'I don't . . . think . . . I quite get it.'

'One way of putting it is that: while the lower class has superficially adopted the etiquette (the manners) of the middle class, on its part – the middle class has surreptitiously adopted the morality of the lower class.'

'Good God!'

'The morality of the lower class is: take care of number one! And the only care that counts is what money can buy – the place you live in, the *things* you own, the people you can manipulate, and how much you can get away with unfairly; in other words, how successful you are at taking advantage of someone else. "Status seeking", for example, is pure proletariat. Sexual promiscuity. The vulgarity of conspicuous consumption. Indifference to the future. Inner sloth or insatiable greed; and a total alienation from your children, your job, your social or communal responsibilities . . . I could go on.'

'I'm thinking of my parents . . . and my brother . . .'

They sipped their watered drinks. Jeffrey stood up and stretched. 'The miraculous thing,' he said, 'is that so many people have been taken in by the simple confusion between etiquette and morality. They think because the lower class is aping the manners of the middle class that they've adopted



the morality of the middle class; whereas, all the time, the process has been going on in the opposite direction. Under cover of middle class etiquette, the bourgeoisie has been infiltrated by the morality of the lower class. Miraculous!

'Then that's why you say there is no bourgeoisie?'

'Right.'

'But then, what's left? What happens to your desire to become middle class? – to say nothing of your reason for wanting to marry me?'

'Why, it fits perfectly. It gives me the grounds of a truly persuasive argument.' (He was excited: and strode about the room, amid the furniture of a dozen periods of style.) 'Part of the reason that there is no genuine bourgeoisie is that nobody nowadays wants to be "conventional". Nobody has the guts to be a real good middle-class man (with the secret question, the unanswered awareness, the tragic pragmatism and all that). Everybody wants to be *different*.'

'Well, that cuts to the quick . . .' But then Lavinia suddenly realized why the thought of the office boy continued to plague her: even he, yes, even *he* wanted (at least said he wanted) to be different . . . 'Then,' she said, 'that would apply even to my mother and my father; my dull brother; the naïve friends who never left White Plains; even the bright girls at Smith . . .'

'Certainly.' Jeffrey sat down opposite her again, folded his hands and looked her squarely in the face. 'Don't you see now, Lavinia, what I'm coming to? Don't you see how this gives me the best hope of things working out between us that I've had since we met? Since I first started this research?'

'No.'

'The point is this: if there is no bourgeoisie because the middle class has been suborned by the morality of the lower class; and if everyone is trying to be different, to avoid what they think of as mediocre conventionality – well, then, *the most different thing you can be* is to become genuinely *bourgeois*! If you fulfil not only the conventions of middle class etiquette

but if you are really equal to middle class *morality* – then you'll be practically unique in this shabby world!

'You think it would be that different?'

'How different do you want to be, Lavinia?'

'Different enough to feel fulfilled as an individual.'

'Well, the way to do it is to wear the mask of the bourgeoisie. But under it – without anyone knowing but your husband, your children, and your friends – to *be* what you *appear* to be! – unlike everybody else . . . You won't have to be a hermit, ending up alone in her imagination; you'll have a group that matters, that's worth belonging to. And then you'll have the freedom to become your own private self within that group. You can't make all of the rules for a world to live in by yourself. What really "individuates" you is how you operate within a set of rules that you didn't invent.'

'You mean, as things stand: nothing is what it seems.'

'Right. That's the delusion of the stuffed-shirt bourgeoisie. Nothing is what it seems – and probably never was. But we need to appear to accept an appearance, if for no other reason than, at least, so that we have a life relatively stable enough to bring up children in.'

'Until they see through it . . . Besides: why think of our having children when you and I have barely formed ourselves yet?' Even in the moment of saying this, Lavinia thought what she had come to like about Jeffrey's apartment, with its profusion of furniture styles, was the fact that richness makes the best chance for simplicity because it offers an opportunity to select – to pare away, to carve out . . .

'Why think of having children?' he repeated. 'Because they will force us to shape ourselves. We'll have to be something decisive – at least in their eyes. We'd owe it to them. Otherwise, what would they have to revolt against?'

'Of course, you're right there. We'd have to give them something to rebel against. Oh . . .' she moaned. 'The worst thing that can happen – and that usually does happen – is

that, as we grow older, we'll each become more and more like our own parents – no matter how much we disapprove of them now.'

'That's why you and I were meant for each other,' Jeffrey said, leaning across the table and touching her cheek. 'You'll be able to keep me from becoming like my father – a selfish son of a bitch.'

'An egomaniac,' she said.

'Living off women,' he added.

'Dying his hair; changing his name – the phony.'

'Irresponsible; living only for pleasure.'

'And you,' Lavinia said, hopefully, 'can keep me from becoming like my mother – a servant to her shoddy possessions; a maid, a laundress, nursemaid, cook – living only to be reassured by the opinions of others that her life is worth living.'

'Brainless,' he said.

'A sucker,' she added.

'Sexless.'

Lavinia's eyes filled with tears. 'What a pathetic life,' she said – compassionate for her mother now as she had never been before. 'What a wasted life.'

'You remember,' Jeffrey began, '“Slave of the wheel of labour . . . what to him are Plato and the swing of Pleiades?”'

'Yes.'

'It's a poem about a peasant. A common labourer. The lowest of the lower class. Ironical that it applies so aptly to the so-called middle class. It helps to prove my point – the computer's point – doesn't it?'

'Yes.'

'One can't go on forever acting-out a childhood revolt. Sooner or later we have to be *the old folks* ourselves, you know . . . Will you marry me?'

They stared at each other across the table.

'Being bourgeois, the way you want to be, I mean: really admirably, but with the ambivalence of knowing that that's

the best you can accommodate to in this world – for social purposes; because you have to participate in some group; so that it gives you the freedom to be yourself in yourself – do you truly believe that would be *different*? I mean: is that really the most different thing *I* can look forward to? And make you happy in the process?’

‘It looks like a clinching argument to me,’ he smiled happily.

‘All right, then. I’ll do it!’

Jeffrey came around the table and took her in his arms. ‘You make me so happy,’ he said. And then they kissed.

‘I’m glad to see your cold is so much better,’ she said.

‘Darling!’ He hugged her tight and kissed her all around the neck.

‘Sweetheart . . .’ Lavinia began cautiously. ‘I think it would be appropriate for me to call my parents to tell them.’

‘In the middle of the night? You don’t think it’s too late?’

‘I think they’d want me to. Unless you mind.’

‘Mind? No. Not at all. I agree. Of course. It’s the right thing to do . . .’ He beamed with satisfaction. ‘It’s just the sort of thing I’d expect of you!’

THE END